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# The ASBURY SEMINARIAN

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The  
Wesleyan  
Message  
In The  
Life And  
Thought  
Of Today

SUMMER 1957

Bulletin of Asbury Theological Seminary



# The ASBURY SEMINARIAN

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## The Wesleyan Message In The Time And Thought Of Today

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## *Editorial . . .*

### **Existentialism: Today and Tomorrow**

Harold B. Kuhn

The day is largely past in which the term Existentialism must be either intoned or spat out. From its original meaning as connoting a fusion of nordic melancholy with gallic disillusionment, it has come to signify an approach to life which seeks to come to grips with the impact of our kind of world upon man's total responses. We miss the point if we think of modern man as merely beset by a world of concentration camps, thermo-nuclear weapons and an omnipresent threat of war. These factors have, to be sure, aggravated his crisis. The real problem lies deeper, in the neuroses which stem from the soul-sickness and anxieties of guilt-ridden man.

This is another way of saying, that a mechanized age has not created the contemporary crisis. A century ago, Kierkegaard sized up the situation; and from a point somewhat removed from the modern industrialization and its depersonalization of man, he gave one of the most penetrating analyses of the plight of man who sought to erect his life without serious regard for the principles of revealed Faith. Existentialism has arisen, then, primarily as a stop-gap measure for men upon whom Christianity had lost its hold.

Elsewhere in this Journal, the major themes of Existentialism have been expressed: the primacy of existence over essence, the concept of the boundary, the homelessness of the human spirit, the subjectivity of truth, the concept of dread or anguish, the leap of faith, etc. These, taken together, represent a protest against the mere rational man, or the mere dynamic man, in terms of another understanding of life. This understanding centers in the view that life's meaning can only be revealed in terms of a crisis involving the whole person. It must be recognized that this analysis of life is, at best, a morbid over-concern with the elements of pain, weirdness and ugliness in human life.

It has long been recognized that existentialism, as an attempt of man to describe his existence and its contingencies, his conflicts and their meaning for him, has an involvement with newer trends in art, literature and psychology. This involve-

ment has frequently been expressed in terms of revolt -- revolt against classic norms, in favor of some forms which reflect man's deeper concerns. Thus it has become customary to speak of 'the existentialist level' in art, in which organic forms (and indeed, idealism of all types) disappear. The ingredients of reality are set in a framework relatively independent of the essential categories of space, time and causality.

Literature, which is verbal art, has likewise felt the impact of the existentialist revolt. It goes without saying that such writers as Augustine, with his exploration of the disintegrative force of unconfessed guilt and unforsaken sin, and Pascal, with his protest against the depersonalizing effect of the machine, embodied strongly existential elements. In the nineteenth century the secular writers Ibsen and Dostoevsky explored the world of man in his finitude and estrangement, while Kierkegaard grappled with almost pathological desperation with man's predicament within the power-forms of Danish society.

Contemporary literature, when it treats of serious themes, frequently utilizes such subjects as alcoholism and drug addiction as a backdrop for the exploration of man's fundamental anxieties, particularly guilt, the feeling of alienation, the threat of annihilation, and the menace of meaninglessness. In the areas of contemporary art and literature, it is especially evident that the existential movement(s) have moved in to fill a vacuum left when a vital Christian faith has lost its hold.

The same may be said for the relationship which has been observed to exist between contemporary existentialism and depth psychology. While the former has drawn heavily upon the latter, it is little short of amazing that psychiatry has had so little to say concerning the great themes which have engaged the existential critics of modern life. The existentialists, from Soren Kierkegaard to Jean-Paul Sartre, have been concerned with modern man's anxiety, his emotional impoverishment, his sense of alienation, and his emptiness in a world which would seem designed to leave him full. But those whose business is emotional health have been strangely silent with respect to these questions. One is tempted to inquire, Why has not the existential movement penetrated contemporary psychiatry?

It is interesting to note that from within the profession which was fathered by Freud, there seems to be arising a protest. Erich Fromm, who has been called "the chief ethicist in current psycholanalytic thought", has in his The Sane Society, called

into question the exclusive preoccupation of psychiatry with man's biological rootage, in terms of what he calls 'humanistic psychoanalysis'. It is perhaps too early to evaluate Fromm's work; and certainly his reaction against his profession's predominantly functional orientation (that is, with its root-concepts of drives, counterdrives and field forces) certainly does not spring from a specifically religious concern. Rather, it seems to be in terms of going beyond a purely biological orientation, to a framework which will give an adequate account for the total data of human experience.

Of the things which Fromm says, the most important for our consideration is this: that persons who are by usual psychiatric standards 'mentally healthy' may in fact be alienated, persons without selves. He makes guilt and anxiety to be more than mere symptoms, as the traditional analytic view would have them to be. He sees that they are inevitable and appropriate reactions, that they may be the call of the self to the self. Or to use the language of the existentialist, anxiety and guilt may be the signals which beckon him to an 'authentic existence' through the 'leap of faith.'

The factors which we have been considering raise a question, To what constructive purpose may existentialism be put in our time? Most of us who have found anchorage in the acceptance of the historic Christian faith will hardly wish to exchange its categories of repentance, faith, conversion, sanctification, etc., for the notions of despair, annihilation, anguish, and bounding leap. These latter seem, at best, but a poor substitute for the former. Perhaps they are the most which we can expect those upon whom the Christian faith has lost its hold to accept.

It is possible, in other words, that existentialism, especially of the theistic variety, may offer a vocabulary in terms of which some individuals in the vast pagan segment of our population may come to comprehend their predicament. But even if members of this population-group should find, by the 'leap of faith' some sort of a relationship with God, it is difficult to see by what means a communion of saints could be established upon the basis of existential terms. Unless existentialism be mobilized as a "schoolmaster to bring men to Christ" it can scarcely be expected to leave much which is enduring in its wake, from the point of view of specific Christian faith.

Existentialism may have something to contribute to contemporary specialists in mental health. We have noted that psychiatry seems, from forces within itself, to be moving toward something of an existentialist understanding of modern

man's neuroses. Should there be established some kind of rapport between psychiatry and the existentialists' analysis of the human predicament, it is possible that the tragic gulf between religion and psychiatry might be bridged. Here, too, existentialism offers possibilities as a leavening agent. If its value as a cure may be called into question, it may nevertheless prove to be useful in the realm of diagnosis.

It may be noted, finally, that historic Christianity may well observe the existentialist revolt, to discern at what points her emphases have been weak. Certainly the insights, that guilt driven underground leads to disastrously corrosive results, or that it is the responsible individual that counts, or that man is by nature homeless in his world, can be applied with constructive effectiveness in Christian preaching. Again, the concept of individual responsibility as a part of 'authentic existence' is an ingredient in the Christian evangel no less than a category in the existentialist's system. While these and other factors may not be definitive for the content of Christian preaching, they are highly suggestive for the emphasis which should mark our proclamation.



# What is Existentialism?

William M. Arnett

The tragedies and disillusionment of our modern world have given rise to what is known in our days as "existentialism". In fact, the term "existentialism" has become one of the most common in our present-day theological and philosophical vocabulary. The vigor and significance of this school of thought can be gathered from the volumes of recent literature on the subject.<sup>1</sup>

This is not to infer that the authors of these books are existentialists. On the contrary, most of them have subjected the existentialist movement to a very critical evaluation. It is significant, however, that they have deemed the movement of such importance that it should be given careful examination and analysis. *Time* magazine (July 16, 1956) expressed the opinion that existentialism was a word "for intellectuals to play with." But it is not a mere intellectual "fad," as the religious editor pointed out, for various kinds of respectable thinkers are existentialists. Whatever its weakness from a Christian point of view, it is a serious philosophy, born out of the travail of our times.

## *A Venture at Definition*

This writer overheard a lively conversation an evangelically minded pastor was having with two ladies of another denomination. The topic of conversation centered about the necessity of a personal, experiential relationship with our Lord. The pastor was attempting to bring the truth of that necessity upon the two ladies themselves, and there was a bit of friendly argument about it, until finally he let go with a rather heavy salvo: "What both of you need is an existential encounter with God!" Needless to say, the spirited conversation slowed down considerably at that point, and an effort at explanation followed. But explanation is not altogether easy, particularly when it involves the uninitiated. And an attempt to define the term may be more difficult, for existentialism is an evasive term which might be defined according to any one of a number of peripheral

<sup>1</sup>A partial list of publications includes: Ronald Bailey, *What is Existentialism*, 1950; Kurt F. Reinhardt, *The Existentialist Revolt*, 1952; J. M. Spier, *Christianity and Existentialism*, 1953; John Wild, *The Challenge of Existentialism*, 1955; Arthur C. Cochrane, *The Existentialists and God*, 1956; Carl Michalson (ed.) *Christianity and the Existentialists*, 1956.

concepts. However, when one moves past peripheral and adorning postulations, there remains a core of meaning about which a venture at definition might be attempted. For example, Helmut Kuhn says it may be defined as that school of thought "which undertakes to incorporate the trial of suffering in its philosophical or theological structure." He further states that it is "a philosophy which tries to win certainty through despair." Roland Bailey (*What is Existentialism?* p. 15) defines existentialism as a "creed of decision, commitment, and action," through which "man finds a true life and reality by the response of his whole being in relation to his life and circumstances here and now, with a rejection of theory and reason."

The term also basically implies the priority of "existence" over "essence". In other words, it is a philosophy according to which "existence is prior to essence." The individual person "exists", and the fact of his existence is prior to our ideas or rationalizations about him. The individual is not being determined by the essence or nature of "man"; as existing he determines himself. The freedom of the individual is a basic affirmation of the existentialist. Furthermore "Existentialism" is the thought life and action of the man who is not content to be a spectator at the ultimate crises of life and death, but who is committed to decision and involvement in these crises.

#### *Factors Involved in the Rise of Existentialism*

Before tracing the basic concepts of existentialism in greater detail, it would be well to observe the forces or conditions which have caused its appearance in our time. Donald Bailey, in his analysis, What is Existentialism? has suggested seven factors which have contributed to the phenomenal rise and acceptance of the philosophy of existence (p. 9):

1. The need for some creed in a broken and suffering world, when death is always at hand. (To this we could add the disillusionment following two World Wars in a single generation.)
2. A reaction against a dehumanized world, where men are machines, or feel themselves caught in an impersonal and soulless system.
3. A protest against the futility and frustration of life when religion lost its hold.
4. A decision to find a way to fullness of life through personal experience and devoted commitment amid all the theories and politics that depend on specula-



tion and talk.

5. Increasing disillusionment with the promising hopes of science, especially in view of its immense power of destruction.
6. A need to compensate for a deep and unrecognized sense of anxiety and dread in the modern world.
7. An expression of widespread moral collapse and decadence.

Thus, it is out of modern man's fears and frustrations, his cares and disillusionments, that existentialism has developed. In many ways it represents a protest against the submergence of the individual into the mass, or the tendency to make him a cog in a machine. As David E. Roberts has so forcefully pointed out, it is out of the desire to safeguard the value and freedom of the individual man, that certain characteristics or traits emerge which provide common ground for all who would call themselves Existentialists.

They are anxious to safeguard and to develop the inner freedom of the individual person. They declare, in one way or another, that man can come to terms with reality only through coming to terms with himself. Therefore they are opposed to hyper-intellectual, detached approaches to philosophy. They are opposed to any system which abstracts from the hopes and fears of the individual or which attempts to fit man into some sort of impersonal schematism, whether the schematism be the operation of natural law according to science or the operation of logical law according to Hegel. So far as man's social relations are concerned, virtually every exponent of existentialism has had some prophetic things to say about the perils of mass-mentality. The achievement of true selfhood is seen as involving a capacity to endure isolation, a willingness to suffer for the sake of creativity, a readiness to defy group pressures whenever they tend to make man a cog in a machine. ("Faith and Freedom in Existentialism" *Theology Today*, v. 8, pp. 469, 470).

#### *Historical Background of Existentialism*

If the historical background were to be outlined in very general terms, the philosophy of existence would have to be traced back through the movement of thought which has been "a reaction of the philosophy of man against the excesses of the philosophy of ideas and the philosophy of things," as Emmanuel Monier

has stated in his Existential Philosophies (p. 2). Under such a broad survey, the ancestors of existentialism would include Socrates, who reacted against cosmogonic speculations with his "Know thyself"; the Stoics, who opposed the sophistry of the Greeks with the demand to a rigorous mastery of life; Augustine, who defended his doctrine of man against the Essential moralism of Pelagius; and Pascal who shaped all the previous theories of man in preparation for Kierkegaard. Outstanding among the progenitors, however, is the Danish thinker, Soren Kierkegaard. To this man we must now give attention.

#### *The Father of Modern Existentialism*

Contemporary existentialism is rooted primarily in the thought of Kierkegaard (1813-1855), a melancholy and eccentric Dane who died just about one hundred years ago. Any serious attempt to understand existentialist philosophy must necessarily give attention to the life and writings of this "Socrates of the North", who, by common admission, is the most original thinker in Danish history. Though intellectually brilliant and highly educated, he was a gloomy personality whose life was deeply shadowed by tragic factors. These factors included the indelible influence of his father, a highly introspective and melancholy man; a broken engagement with a young woman, Regina Olsen, to whom he was betrothed, and whom he deeply loved; and finally a bitter attack upon him by a Danish journal, The Corsair, which held him up to public ridicule, an experience which lacerated his sensitive soul and poisoned his life with bitterness and undoubtedly hastened his death. These elements of tragedy pervaded his thought to a very marked degree, and served to mold his conception of Christianity.

The real significance of Kierkegaard was not discovered until World War I, principally through the findings of the "Crisis" theologians, to whom is traced the rise and development of Neo-orthodoxy. Like Tertullian, the Latin Church Father of the early Christian era, Kierkegaard coined a new vocabulary to set forth vital aspects of Christian truth. Such terms as existence, existential, incognito (relating to Jesus Christ), contemporaneous, encounter, offense, anxiety, dread, decision, and such like, were not careless verbiage, but the vehicles to convey his deep convictions. It is a tribute to his powers that the writings of such men as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, and others, are in many ways a reflection of the thought patterns of this remarkable Dane. Kierkegaard was a vigorous critic of the church in his day, and men in our century who have reacted violently to shallow liberalism and sterile rationalism have found in Kierkegaard

one of their most effective weapons.

*Main Issues In Kierkegaard's Thought*

In his century, Kierkegaard registered vigorous protest against three movements which had become strongly entrenched in nineteenth century philosophy: (1) Intellectualism as represented by Hegel; (2) Moralism as defended by Kant; and (3) Aestheticism as propounded by Schleiermacher. Of these three movements, he chose as the target of his sharpest criticism the Hegelian intellectualism. Hegelianism not only was the philosophical consummation of Essential thought; but it had also invaded and infected the Danish Lutheran Church and its theology. In pointed contrast to Hegel's lifeless objectivity, Kierkegaard insisted that truth was subjective, that there is the principle of spiritual inwardness, and that "only the truth that edifies is truth for thee." He regarded Hegelianism as the worst possible framework for a proper understanding and interpretation of Christianity.

Kierkegaard's starting point was the "existence of the individual." The import of the philosophy of Hegel was to depreciate the value of human personality. In Hegel's thought, the individual is merely a manifestation of a greater eternal process. On the other hand, Kierkegaard began with man's immediate experience as a subject, a being in need, whose very existence is at stake. He insisted that life and the world can be understood only from the point of view of our own individual personal life. It is only by personal involvement and personal appropriation of divinely given truth that spiritual inwardness can be realized. This in turn involved another important aspect for Kierkegaard: the importance of decision. For him, the highest manifestation of human personality is decision, a decision in which the whole man is involved. Each individual stands in the inescapable presence of God; each must decide for or against Him. As H. R. Mackintosh has stated in his Types of Modern Theology (pp. 224, 225):

Knowledge of God's truth becomes ours only in the act of deciding for it with all our strength. Decision is no mere consequence of recognizing truth, it is a living and essential factor in apprehending it. To think subjectively -- and no other kind of thinking matters here -- is to act upon a risk. Cool detachment is an atmosphere in which we cannot believe, as the New Testament accounts believing. "Thou art the man" are words which must sound in our ears perpetually if, in Kierkegaard's special phrase, our thought is to be "existential" -- i.e., carried

on with the unfailing consciousness that we stand before God, guilty and blind, awaiting His judgment and mercy.

It was in man's sense of guilt that Kierkegaard found the enduring reality of religion. Man must pass through the agonies of self-accusation, fear, dread, and anxiety, and consequential despair and anguish with a "blind leap over the abyss" into repentance and isolation. By this means the individual arrives at a realization of his own life which enables him to return to the world with the new-found ability to accept himself, his conflicts, and his social affiliations. Through this path, the "existent" discovers inward peace.

It is through these emphases and concepts that Kierkegaard points to all of the major theses of Existentialism as it has been developed since his day.

#### *Other Basic Concepts in Existentialism*

As we have already pointed out, a major theme of existentialism is the insistence that "existence" is prior to "essence". This is primarily a protest against most rationalisms. The basic concern of Existentialism at this point is with the individual and the personal aspects of being. It is likewise a protest against the attitude of detached reflection, in which man insulates himself against life's realities, as was the case in Hegel's thought.

Other factors in existentialism, according to Emmanuel Monier (op. cit. 24ff.) are:

1. The Contingency of the Human Being. Man is conscious of his finitude, and his sinfulness, and becomes aware of a transcendent Deity, Who is at once his refuge and his malady or despair. Kierkegaard so over-emphasized the transcendence of God that he hesitated to name Him, and when necessity demanded a title, the reactionist reverted to the philosophical terms of "the absolutely Unknown" or "the sheer unqualified Being." This reaches its supreme contradiction in the Kierkegaardian Christology, for Christ, as the revelation of God came "incognito" as a mere man, confounding reason by His obscurity, and by his lack of splendor and omnipotence, making it possible for Him to be misinterpreted "with a fair show of reason."
2. The Impotence of Reason. This represents a revolt against abstract speculation which tries to resolve all contradictions into a harmonious, consistent whole.
3. The Bounding-Leap of the Human Being. This is a difficult concept to explain, but involves the Kierke-

gaardian "leap of faith" whereby despairing and defeated man springs convulsively and passionately into a faith which is the means of bridging the gap or gulf between the Infinite and Man. It involves freedom, anguish, choice, and the bounding-leap into faith.

4. The Instability of the Human Being. Realizing he is continuously in the presence of God, the existent individual cannot escape the fact that he is a sinner, and at the same time he knows his life is contingent on the fact of the Supreme Being. The result is anguish, guilt, "sickness unto death", and despair.

5. Estrangement. Depraved man is estranged from God. Kierkegaard, reacting against the easy-going optimism of a quasi-pantheistic idealism, set forth an erroneous doctrine of transcendence that actually results in a permanent estrangement from God which virtually negates the person and work of Christ the Mediator. It is an antithetical emphasis to the complacent, immanent philosophy and theology.

6. Solitude. The fundamental solitude of existence is found in the isolation of sinful humanity from the transcendent, holy God. Kierkegaard, whose attitudes and convictions were largely anti-social, made much of the element of solitude. The failure of his betrothal, his revulsion to clerical life, and his caustic bitterness against unfaithful friends, were tragic elements in his life from which he projected the idea of forlornness into the Christian life. Isolationism is interlaced with the primary concepts of instability, anguish, and decision.

There is further embellishment to this already morbid picture in the idea of the homelessness of the human spirit, particularly in the thought of the two atheistic existentialists, the German, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre, the Frenchman. In Heidegger's view, man finds himself "being thrown" into a place and situation not of his own choosing, and compelled to fight a battle on terms of blind fate. Sartre develops the idea of man being held in the iron fist of the "totally other" which challenges his security at every level. With these men, the existentialist stream moves in the area of a rabid atheism which finally culminates in nihilism.

#### *Conclusion*

Existentialism can be understood as a vigorous reaction to a shallow, optimistic liberalism which sought to accommodate the Christian message to a prevailing culture. It is a strong protest against the pride of modern man. As in the case of most

reactionary movements, the tendency is to go to extremes, and truth is rarely found in radical extremes. Truth may be there, but it is badly intermingled with error. As a result, existentialism is primarily a philosophy of pessimism, with an excessive emphasis upon individuality and subjectivity. The tragic and the morbid in human life are given prominence to the neglect of other legitimate qualities. It is long on diagnosis, but lacking in an effective cure. It is essentially anti-Revelational, hence humanistic in its approach to life. In spite of its more realistic approach to life, it leaves men groping in darkness, which is far removed from "joy and peace in believing" through the power of the Holy Spirit, as promised in a full Gospel in the pages of the New Testament.



# Paul Tillich, An Existential Theologian

Delbert R. Rose

While there are many Christians in the world today who have not so much as heard that there is such a philosophy as "existentialism," yet no well-informed believer can be ignorant of the impact this philosophy is making upon contemporary Christendom. At the very center of those theological circles where existential thought is central today stands Paul Tillich, currently professor at Harvard University. In writing of him as probably "the most highly respected theologian in the United States," Nels F. S. Ferre affirms that Dr. Tillich has received "into his thinking a large dose of existentialism."<sup>1</sup>

## I.

Like other existentialists, Tillich's own experience has had a determinative influence upon his philosophy. To trace the intellectual odyssey of this ranking, philosophical-theologian is to discover that which occasioned his system of thought. Reared in a conservative Lutheran parsonage in Germany, Tillich early recognized a romantic trend in his own feeling and thinking about life. That romanticism expressed itself in his relation to nature which he describes as "a predominantly aesthetic-meditative attitude... as distinguished from a scientific-analytical or technical-controlling relation."<sup>2</sup> That early romantic rapport with, or "mystical participation" in, the natural world was later formulated into Tillich's doctrine of "the participation of nature in the process of fall and salvation."<sup>3</sup> His own daily communication with nature was heightened by those German poets whose verses gave expression to this "nature mysticism," and by those Lutheran influences congenial to his own temperamental trend, namely, "a view that the finite is capable of the infinite, and consequently that in Christ there is a mutual indwelling of the two natures... the divine and the human."<sup>4</sup>

Tillich's romanticism not only meant a special relation to nature, but also to history. As he pondered the past, surveyed the present, and contemplated the future, young Tillich

<sup>1</sup>Nels F. S. Ferre, "Where Do We Go From Here in Theology?" *Religion in Life*, XXV, No. 1 (Winter, 1955-56), p. 99.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Tillich, "Autographical Reflections of Paul Tillich," *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, ed. by Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>*Loc. cit.* - <sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.

came to feel the inescapable tragedy of historical existence. Early inhibited by sociological and psychological factors growing out of the authoritarianism of home, school and state, he longed for release from those intellectual and moral restraints that controlled his environment. But "every attempt to break through was prevented by the unavoidable guilt consciousness produced by the identification of the parental with the divine authority."<sup>5</sup> Finally, however, the break came when, in discussion with his minister-father who held that true philosophy and revealed truth were without conflict, gave him a feeling of freedom from his parents' classical orthodoxy. Commenting upon this stage in his life, Tillich wrote: "It is this difficult and painful break-through to autonomy which has made me immune against any system of thought or life which demands the surrender of this autonomy."<sup>6</sup> This was a victory for "autonomous reason" which figures so basically in Tillich's system.

Thoroughly schooled in the Greek and Latin classics, and in the classical German philosophies before matriculating as a student of theology, Tillich brought to his theological studies a well-disciplined mind in the humanities. But his discovery of Kierkegaard's dialectical psychology, the social philosophies of the times, and his encounter with "positive philosophy" as formulated by Schelling led him to see that Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche had become "decisive for the destiny of the twentieth century."

His disillusionment over the failure of classical philosophy to achieve a synthesis between Christianity and humanism, soon led him to see that only an existentialism fully faced the actualities and demands of human existence. World War I and the postwar years produced a great revolution in Tillich's thinking. With the whole of his people's life conditioned by the political problems of a defeated Germany, and the whole social structure in "a state of dissolution," he saw human relations with respect "to authority, education, family, sex, friendship, and pleasure" plunged into a *chaos*, which was later to prove creative for his system of thought. In the midst of these "manifold problems, conflicts, fears, expectations, ecstasies, and despairs, practically as well as theoretically," Tillich found the materials for his apologetic theology.

Reacting against the most radical of his "neo-orthodox" contemporaries on the continent, Tillich was convinced that cultural problems should not be excluded from theological thought

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8. <sup>6</sup>*Loc. cit.*



and therefore, he sought in his theological system to come to grips with every phase of man's existence. Coming to America in 1933, when Hitlerism was breaking out in Europe, Tillich broadened his contacts with the world of human affairs and deepened his studies in "depth-psychology." Participation in the studies of the relation of religion and health, and in the religious-socialist movement in this country kept Tillich alert to the total context of human existence within which one must think and live if he is to realistically face "the existential question of our ultimate concern and the existential answer of the Christian message."<sup>7</sup> Tillich's understanding of man became thoroughly permeated with concepts derived from studies in depth psychology and in the political, social and religious moods of the times.

## II.

Out of his varied background of experience and study in Europe and America, Tillich attempted what he recognized would be a most difficult task, that of writing a system of existential truth. To him, existential truth is that "truth which lives in the immediate self-expression of an experience." The dangers in formulating such a systematic work are that "either the existential element destroys systematic consistency or that the systematic element suffocates the existential life of the system."<sup>8</sup>

As a systematic theologian, Tillich's leading concepts are Being, Non-being, and Being-Itself; and his dominant principle throughout his system is the "method of correlation." His three leading concepts do not exist in isolation, but only in "correlation" and interdependence. As the foundation stones for his theological structure, he lays down these pairs of correlates which are interdependent and interpenetrable: Being and Non-being or finite being, Being-Itself and Non-being or (God), and Finite Being and Being-Itself (or the God and Man relationship).

There is thus a dialectic in man, a dialectic in God, and a dialectic between God and man. All three are interdependent and interpenetrable. Being reveals nonbeing and nonbeing reveals being. Together they reveal being-itself and at the same time being-itself (God) reveals finite being.<sup>9</sup>

From the foregoing it is readily apparent that Tillich's frame of reference is an ontological one. In fact, his "primary con-

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 10.    <sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup>Arthur Cochrane, *The Existentialists and God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), p. 78.

cern is to correlate ontology (philosophy) and revelation (religion) and show that both must be ultimately unified through a profound interdependence."<sup>10</sup> And what does Tillich mean by philosophy and by revelation? For him, philosophy is "that cognitive endeavor in which the question of being is asked."<sup>11</sup> In an ontological analysis:

philosophy tries to show the presence of being and its structures in the different realms of being, in nature and in man, in history and in value, in knowledge and in religion. But in each case it is not the subject matter as such with which philosophy deals but the constitutive principles of being, that which is always present if a thing participates in the power to be and to resist nonbeing.<sup>12</sup>

For Tillich, revelation is the "manifestation of the mystery of being for the cognitive function of human reason. It mediates knowledge--a knowledge, however, which can be received only in a revelatory situation, through ecstasy and miracle."<sup>13</sup> And what is the revelatory situation for Tillich?

It is not an exaggeration to say that today man experiences his present situation in terms of disruption, conflict, self-destruction, meaninglessness, and despair in all realms of life. This experience is expressed in the arts and in literature, conceptualized in existential philosophy, actualized in political cleavages of all kinds, and analyzed in the psychology of the unconscious.... The question arising out of this experience is not, as in the Reformation, the question of a merciful God and the forgiveness of sins.... It is the question of a reality in which the self-estrangement of our existence is overcome, a reality of reconciliation and reunion, of creativity, meaning, and hope. We shall call such a reality the 'New Being,' a term whose presuppositions and implications can be explained only through the whole system.<sup>14</sup>

Anything like an adequate presentation of Tillich's system

<sup>10</sup>John E. Skinner, "A Critique of Tillich's Ontology," *Anglical Theological Review*, XXXIX, No. 1 (January, 1957), p. 53.

<sup>11</sup>Paul Tillich, *Biblical Religion and The Search For Ultimate Reality* (Chicago Press, 1955), p. 5.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup>Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 129.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 49.

in this paper is impossible. However, it is clear thus far that he views philosophy as that which asks the existential questions answers. Confronted by the existential situation, philosophy analyzes human existence as revolving around (1) human rationality or reason, (2) human finitude or being, (3) human sin or existence, (4) man's living unity or life, and (5) human destiny or history. The content of the corresponding answers which theology brings to these five questions are (1) Revelation, (2) God, (3) Christ, (4) the Spirit, and (5) the Kingdom, respectively. The overcoming power of the seeming contradictions and paradoxes of existence can be found in "the New Being," that is, in Jesus as the Christ, an event which is at once both the center of history and the criterion of final revelation.

### III.

No one would question the brilliance of Tillich as a thinker, or the massiveness of his learning, or the "majestic structure" of his system of thought. But there are many who would challenge the foundation upon which he has built the "grandly conceived" synthesis of philosophy and religion. While Tillich attempts to give biblical religion a place in his system, "in the last analysis an ontological conception takes the primacy away from biblical faith" and "the tension between ontology and revelation is resolved by Tillich in favor of ontologism."<sup>15</sup> When this Harvard professor has stated his view it appears to several that he has identified finitude and evil, depersonalized God, rendered Christ dispensable to his system, settled for a modalism in, and a Sabellian doctrine of, the trinity, and conceived of the Kingdom in less than supernaturalistic terms.<sup>16</sup>

While some of his colleagues and admirers may speak of Tillich's theology as "a modern Evangelicalism," yet he specifically declares that he has fought against, and must continue to do so, any supernaturalistic theology which builds upon the grammatico-historical interpretation of the Bible and the historic creeds of the Christian Church. While Mr. Tillich has borrowed heavily from the language of Scripture and historic Christianity, he has nevertheless emptied those terms of their historic content and refilled them with his own philosophically-conceived meanings.

In writing about the existentialist theologians among whom Tillich stands, the none-too-orthodox Nels Ferre affirms that Existentialism offers no hard affirmations, scandal-

<sup>15</sup>John E. Skinner, "A Critique of Tillich's Ontology," *op. cit.*, pp. 60, 61.

<sup>16</sup>Arthur Cochrane, *The Existentialists and God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), pp. 81, 85, 90.

ous to a this-worldly naturalist. At the same time modern existentialism is wise enough to make heavy use of classical symbolism, particularly that of Christian theology. It poses as a return to a fuller and more real Christian faith, with the supposedly impossible superstructure of Christian supernaturalism sloughed off. It can speak of the resurrection of Jesus, for instance, without any reference to his resurrection, to his being raised by God; and it can refer to our resurrection, even of the body, with no thought of personal life after death. It can speak of the necessity of eschatology, without having unilinear view of time and without expecting an actual end of our history as such.<sup>17</sup>

It must be concluded that while Tillich has his eye upon the correct existential questions which the world situation forces thinkers to ask, yet it is also clearly evident that he has not come forth with the historic Christian answers to man's predicament. His mystical naturalism has failed to do justice to the supernatural revelation in the Bible concerning God, man, sin, Christ, and the salvation of believing men in the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

<sup>17</sup>Nels F. S. Ferre, "Where Do We Go From Here in Theology?" *Religion in Life*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

# An Existential Interpretation Of The Doctrine Of Holiness

Mildred Wynkoop

If sanctification is a life as well as a doctrine it needs an adequate philosophical context to support it intellectually as a doctrine and to enforce its imperatives upon ourselves as individuals in a most vital and compelling way. There is a term recently appropriated by a large segment of Christianity which bears in itself the moral urgency which has always characterized divine revelation and Biblical truth and preaching. The word is existentialism. In spite of the varied associations brought to this term which would be unacceptable to conservative thinking, there is a core meaning that ought not to be lost by way of intellectual default.

Religious existentialism is a reaction against hollow orthodoxy, icily correct doctrine and any empty religious profession. It is an affirmation for theological truth presented in such a way that, when properly believed, it demands a thorough transformation of a man's everyday life. Its meaning is simple yet profound. It is eternal truth demonstrated in life situations. The danger in the "Neo-Orthodox" emphasis is too great a surrender of the ground of eternal truth. But the danger we face is in affirming a belief in the doctrine of holiness that does not issue in a full and satisfactory expression of that faith in daily living situations. The doctrine of holiness can never find its way into any museum of aesthetically superior creedal objects d'art. The decrees of the Council of Trent and the Westminster Confession are classic examples of creedal perfection. They are intellectual formulations calculated to win intellectual response mainly. This the doctrine of holiness can never be. It is an existential doctrine displaying its beauty and power, not in verbal eloquence and fine definition alone, but in its morally transforming power in the lives of men. If it could be beautifully expressed apart from that life demonstration, its very beauty would condemn it because the degree of clarity with which it is understood becomes a measure of the moral responsibility a man has to it. As a segment of Biblical truth it was given to live by not to look at and admire. The uniqueness of Biblical truth is its transforming power.

Jesus was the first real religious existentialist. He, perhaps

never framed a doctrine or issued a command which could be intellectually accepted apart from a radical change in the mode of a man's existence. Everything he was as a person or said as a teacher was disturbing to religious complacency, irritating to self-righteousness and terrifically demanding through and through the whole moral structure of man. His hearers had the Old Testament scriptures, many of them kept the law, but Jesus had a way of stripping the abstractions away from the commandments with one stroke and with another laying bare the poverty-stricken souls of men clothed with mere superficial obedience. He applied the law to conscience in a way that demanded a moral response.

No one heard Jesus speak without becoming better -- or worse. No one could listen to him without making some kind of a moral decision. In this Jesus gave truth an existential interpretation. Something had to happen and always did. Matthew heard Jesus' "follow me," and he left his money stall and followed. The rich, young ruler's strict and noble orthodoxy collapse before the existential interpretation of the law by Jesus. He went sorrowfully away to a deformed life, not a transformed one. Saul (Paul) was confronted by an existential presentation of Christ's person to him. He cried out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"--he was told what to do--and he did it.

Jesus did not underestimate the law or abrogate it, or discredit it, he simply crowded it in on the human conscience until there was no room left for mere intellectual approval or mere verbal assent. Men were forced to put themselves, from the profoundest depth of human personality, in a different relationship to God, to themselves, to others, -- a change which revolutionized the total man, for better or for worse.

The doctrine of sanctification is an existential doctrine more profoundly than it can be said to be a formal doctrine, and it must be existentially interpreted. He who professes this doctrine must, moreover, judge himself by this interpretation. He dare not measure himself and his progress in grace, against too low a level of an understanding of Jesus' demands nor too complacent a satisfaction with himself as a Christian. He must never underestimate the mystery of the grace of cleansing which the coming of the Holy Spirit provides and he must testify to that grace with the deepest humility and thankfulness, but he must also be forever aware of the fact that sanctification is a radical life transformation, demanding moral alterations running inward to the deepest root of the human personality. Life commitments were contracted at the altar of consecration that cannot remain there at the altar, forgotten or neglected. God's



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grace is forfeited by persistently broken promises and failure to daily comply with the existential interpretations of the doctrine of holiness that demanded our decision in the first place.

We are indebted to John Wesley for rediscovering and revitalizing the doctrine of perfection. The perfection which God demands, said he, is the perfection of love. Sanctification is perfect love. But what, we may ask, is perfect love? And we go back to Jesus to find the answer, as Wesley did.

The first commandment is, Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and all thy mind, and with all thy strength. The second is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is no other commandment greater than these (Mark 12:29-31).

Here in a few words is an existential interpretation of holiness that respects yet cuts through all intellectual and creedal formulations and lays bare the human heart before its truth. When we say, "I love the Lord with all my heart," we have this standard by which to judge our sincerity and it can be a very humbling experience.

These words of Jesus compels a correction to every low view of sanctification. First, it is a definition, with intellectual content in contrast to emotionalism and irrational systems. Love is a hard word to define. No New Testament writer attempts a formal, abstract definition of it. The reason is that love is never an abstraction. It cannot be defined apart from description or illustration and that is precisely what Jesus does. And it cuts to the quick just as Paul's description of love in I Corinthians 13 cuts to the quick. If it isn't lived, it's too hot to handle.

But secondly, the definition by way of intellectual content is so stated as to expose lack of sincerity and to force a genuine personal decision. An examination of the setting of the text shows that Jesus had been under attack from the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the scribes. They had asked a number of trick questions in an attempt to trap Jesus. The question asked about the most important commandment was probably another trick question. Jesus answered as the text indicates and—"no man after that durst ask him any more questions." Why? Because he had trapped them by an existential interpretation of the law. It was no longer simply an intellectual game, but a deadly serious condemnation of moral failure and they knew it. What mattered it whether the commandments were correctly evaluated? Suddenly, correctness ceased to be an intellectual matter

only, and it became a matter of existential concern. Do I keep the commandments? Do I keep them in the way that I know they ought to be kept? These are always uncomfortable questions.

And thirdly, Jesus put this very personal relationship to the law at the very heart of religion. Here is obedience to God taken out of the realm of mere duty, or calculated impeccability and put into the realm of love. It is life crowded to its outside limits with service. Here is not a compartmentalized life—church duties, home duties, personal rights, and sacred duties and secular duties, with always a question as to where one ended and the other began—but life lived in a prodigality of love for God and others that left no room for questions of religious legalism.

#### I. THE ABSOLUTENESS OF JESUS' INTERPRETATION

When we face this passage of Scripture we are hard-hearted indeed if we do not search our own profession of grace and ask questions of ourselves that may well put us on our knees.

*"Thou Shalt Love the Lord Thy God With All Thy Heart"*

An existential interpretation of the doctrine of holiness—or perfect love—does not see law primarily as an imposition of obligations upon us, but it does require of us a love to God that proceeds from the deepest depth of human personality up and out to the farthest edge of everything we do. The heart includes the emotions, of course, but signifies a depth of being, beyond and underneath emotions and will and thought: It is the main-spring of life which determines the character of everything we think and do. To love with the whole of the heart means that a civil revolution has taken place in the center of our beings which has dethroned selfishness and "my-way-ish-ness" and has enthroned Christ as Lord. This revolution is always bloody. Somebody dies a violent death. Negatively it always involves a crucifixion of every false object of affection, "myself" included. Invariably it occurs in a moment of the most profound obedience. It is probably never an abstract promise of obedience, "I'll do what you want me to do, dear Lord," but always a concrete example of obedience which must be acted upon, immediately. It may seem a very small thing we have to do, but it is always a very touchy and even a painful thing which will be seen later to run directly to the main artery of the spiritual heart. It is a shock to dethrone self, but Jesus' existential interpretation of the law remains a judgment over us, not a consolation, until that crucial work is done.

But love is positive too. It is always an out-flowing of life's



energies. Love is movement. It is not passive and static, but a quality that colors everything we do. Love, as a principle, cannot be defined or located. Love, as a profession, does not distinguish one person from another. But love out of the whole heart gives a fragrance to life that cannot be hidden. It becomes a norm by which distinctions are made between the good and best. It clothes crude, imperfect conduct and faltering service with a winsomeness and loveliness that is always the hallmark of a Christian. There is no bitterness in love. There is no edginess in it or vindictiveness in any measure. There is goodwill through and through it, pouring out in streams of unstudied expression in perfect keeping with the person's natural personality, not ever an artificial or "stylized" mask.

Do I have love like that? Is my total personality nourished by the artery of love to God and pouring out in service or am I like the Salton Sea in the desert of Southern California which is:

A sapphire in a dull gold setting  
A sea lower than sea  
A broken promise to a thirsty land,  
The desert's mockery. (Sunset Magazine)

*"Thou Shalt Love the Lord Thy God With All Thy Soul (Life)"*

The danger in too limited an understanding of holiness is that we begin to live uncriticized lives. The goal of the sanctified life is too easily reached, the ceiling too low. We take comfort in a creed and shield ourselves from the obligation to expansion and its consequent obligation to occupy the expanded areas. Comfortable Christians in a church do not represent the "growing edge" of the church. Jesus' existential interpretation of the law neatly annihilates complacency. He confronts men with a commission sanctioned with a moral challenge that is not discharged at least until death terminates the human capacity to grow. New Testament analogies of the norm for Christian life are perhaps never drawn from static existence. Even the stones of which Peter speaks, are "lively" or "living stones." The rigid, cold, formal, though fixed, quality of concrete is not a biblical picture. Rubber, with its deceptively mobile quality is not a scriptural figure. Rubber accepts imposed configurations without resistance but snaps back to its dead formalism, when the external impulse is relaxed. Corpses are not proper analogies, for all the perfection of their poise and imperturbability. The New Testament makes life the analogy. Life is a vital quality, beset by risk, unpredictableness and irrepressive

variety. Life cannot be externally uniformed and regimented successfully without losing its peculiar value as life. The sanctified life, to satisfy the New Testament demands, must be a living, vital, dynamic heart pumping fresh blood into the farthest extremities of an expanding personality. It is life in Christ, but it is also life in Christ lived to the finger tips.

All human potential is God-given. Sanctified responsibility includes the stewardship of this potential. The world puts a tremendous premium on human ability and pays high prices for its development and utilization. Jesus indicates that a man's Christian obligation is not satisfied before God until the fullest measure of life's capacities have been exploited in God's service. There is no place for hidden talents, for thwarted energies, for dwarfed and stifled creativeness, in God's economy. To love God with the whole of the life means more than maintaining an easily defensible status quo. It means the life-long vocation of expressing love for God in every possible area of our expanding personalities, whether in very hidden and intimate ways or very open and observed ways. It is love lived.

*"Thou Shalt Love the Lord Thy God With All Thy Mind"*

Loving God with the whole mind is putting at God's disposal all the intellectual faculties with which we are endowed. It has to do with ability to understand truth. It involves all our capacities for rational thinking and spiritual insights. Love from the whole mind is not a cheap and easy mental assent to truth, after which all curiosity and mental alertness and desire for learning is stilled. It is not the disposition to throw on the Lord the full obligation to fill our gaping mouths with overwhelming brilliance in the hour of service. Loving God with the mind is inconsistent with a closed mind, a mind which rejects investigation and inquiry and fails to rush the fullest possible development of every ability to think properly. God gave man a rational nature as the only reliable way by which he could reveal himself to man. Emotions cannot be the avenue or source of revelation. Emotions prompt actions but cannot define its own impulse or interpret truth. The will cannot create truth. The will can only force decisions presented by the mind, never can it stand in judgment over truth. The mind, alone, is the slender thread linking God to man. The stewardship of mental development then is a moral obligation upon us, for only as we nourish this area into full maturity can God make Himself known to us maturely and use us as proper instruments for the Kingdom. God has been forced to forge out sections of the kingdom with

blunted, twisted mental tools for lack of ready men and women and the result is a distorted segment of the kingdom. This existential interpretation of perfect love, stands in grim judgment over any indolence on my part as to my stewardship over my mind.

Loving God with the whole mind involves a passionate endeavor to sharpen that rational tool to its keenest edge. It means that no shoddy, bluffing approach to learning will ever be permitted. It means that we live in the constant awareness that we will be required to give an account of our use of our minds. Did we muff an opportunity to make a proper and wise and tactful answer to some inquirer after Christ, because we had not adequately prepared our minds to serve God? Then our guilt is great and our repentance must include renewed preparation and discipline. The man or woman who fails to love God with his whole mind can no more expect God to use him greatly or bless him in service or provide him with a depth of understanding of the Scripture, or even to keep him in the center of God's will in life than one who fails to love God with his whole heart. The Spirit of Truth, which sanctifies, leads us into all truth. He never implants it or drives us into it or violates in any way man's own initiative in the matter of learning. If we do not keep step with the Spirit of Truth we stand in danger of losing his presence.

When I say then, "I love the Lord supremely," do I mean that I actually do love him enough to give him as well a prepared mental instrument as it is in my power to provide? Can I honestly say I love him and fail in this matter? Perfect love--or sanctification--had in it, not as a rider in the contract, but as a main obligation printed in large type the life-long obligation to conscientiously keep a well-disciplined and well-stocked and well-sanctified intelligence through which God could work. Have I kept my part of the contract?

*"Thou Shalt Love the Lord With All Thy Strength"*

As a hand would be quite useless without an arm and a head would be incompetent without a body, so would a religious sentiment or profession of faith be without the cooperation of the whole of a man's personality and physical being. For lack of natural and spiritual vigor, Christian faith must suffer. It does not take great strength to believe a proper doctrine, but Jesus seemed to be saying that the life of perfect love requires as a minimal demand the harnessing of all of a believer's resources. All the motors into which human life is geared must operate at full capacity. Sentiment must issue in fruitfulness.

Profession of grace must not be a paper flower tied to a branch, but a bursting out and expression of the very nature of the plant. The last stand of professionalism or spiritual complacency is invaded and judged by Jesus' interpretation of the law.

Whatever else may be indicated by this interpretation the fact that progress in Christian life is not automatic but deliberate is obvious. Loss of capital and disintegration of assets in the realms of both the material and intellectual, accompanies indifference or any relaxed attentiveness. In spiritual things the same law of death takes over when the law of life is violated. To love God with the whole of one's strength puts a practicality into religious profession that saves it in every instance from unwholesome introspection and detachment from life. It emphasizes the fact that the whole of man's attention and the whole of his moral responsibility must be consciously enlisted in the matter of love to God. Love must be cultivated, nurtured, disciplined. Jesus is saying, it seems, that sanctity is not enemy but virile and utterly congenial to humanhood as such and must exist concomitantly with human life.

When all our strength is occupied in expressing our love to God there is nothing left in time or capacity or possession or desire left to vitiate that love. This leads inevitably to the conclusion that of the two alternatives--complete separation of the secular from the religious (and a denial of the secular), or the sanctification of the secular to religious ends, it is the latter which is Jesus' way. The whole of life, everything involved in human strength, starkly necessary duties, duties incident upon responsibility to any other human being, whether in the family, society, or business, pleasurable and elective engagements, is to express love for God. And that love for God must be expressed to the peak of human capacity--"with the whole of thy strength." Everything that requires strength is involved, for all the strength is involved and with it the whole man putting feet and hands and deliberate attention to his love to God.

## II. THE RELATIVITY IN JESUS' INTERPRETATION

In spite of the specific teaching in the foregoing analytical application of Jesus' existential interpretation of the law, we are left with the problem of how to relate these things to concrete life situations. Had we been left with this section alone without "the second, like to it," uncertainties would have baffled us. Here has been outlined the most thorough-going commitment to a governing center that could be devised for human beings. Here is total integration. Here is moral decision that so far as is humanly possible, is absolute. And the

center is, "the Lord, your God." But a problem arises as we attempt to conceptualize "God" and make of Him the effective object of our love. Abstraction, here, is fatal to real love, for love is not an abstraction. It is here that an unrealness is apt to overwhelm us and rob us of contact with significance and purpose, and leave us to flounder and often fall. We make the total commitment, gear all of life into that commitment, cultivate every capacity to its highest effectiveness, feel the throb and splendor of a perfect love to God, and yet be thwarted and finally defeated for lack of an adequate outlet.

To love God as described above is "the great" commandment. It is "first" because it is the fundamental commandment, the one underlying all the others. But there is a second, not distinct from but arising out of the first which becomes the outward expression of the first and gives evidence of the love which is professed. In fact, so important is the second to the first that John, in developing his philosophy of Jesus Christ, later states boldly that a profession of love for God without the expression of it as designated in the second command constitutes a practical denial of that love. The gentle John states that such a failure reveals the professor as a "liar." This is a hard word and a penetrating moral criticism.

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." This is the test and measure of love to God. It, in the most fundamental way, evidences the sincerity of our love. It also gives it concrete and wholesome content. Had not this description of agape been given to us, Christian profession would have been left dangerously abstract, dangerous because abstraction cancels out love. The second commandment is the test of the keeping of the first. The first without the second would be illusion, the second without the first is impossible. The first describes an attitude toward God, the second, communication with man. The first is love without reserve, without qualification, without limitation--absolute, insofar as men may use that term. The second is love in relation. The first alone, could issue in vapid mysticism and isolationism, for it has no boundaries. The second alone, would issue in a shallow humanism for its boundaries are fixed and the source of its power limited and perverted. Together the abstractions and relations of human life issue in wholesome living because the eternal dimension and perspective can be related and tested by temporal and concrete concerns.

But there is still another challenge and safeguard. A total love for others could be and has been misunderstood. An undisciplined love for others is as harmful to the recipient as it



is disastrous to the one who offers love. Unstructured love has no character. It produces indolence in others and a violated personality and weakened integrity in the giving self. Jesus said, "Love others as you love yourself," and thereby brought into Christian experience content and direction, balance and power.

The commandment, as absolute as the first, touches the quick. We may glibly profess love to God and remain beyond the judgment of men, but this demand becomes a judgment day before the Great Day of Judgment. If perfect love includes an expression of love recognizable to others, equal to the esteem in which we hold ourselves, then any cheap glibness is taken from our witnessing. A Christian will listen kindly to reasoning and acknowledge his faults and lack of graciousness. He will contribute peace and gentleness to a tense, explosive situation. He will honor his obligations, financial, social, in business and at home. He will be scrupulously honest with time, money, confidences, opportunities and responsibilities. If he does not, his profession of divine grace is a "lie," to use John's term.

A Christian who professes perfect love will establish and maintain communication with all men insofar as it is in his power to do so. He will cultivate friendship as he desires others to seek him out. He will not withdraw from the concerns of men. He will identify himself with them, as men, and let flow out of him the fullest measure of the sharing of himself and his Christ as is possible in any given situation. He will not draw his skirts about him and retire from life but will gird himself with the towel of service and plunge his hands into the task needing to be done. If he does not, Jesus' existential interpretation of the law robs him of the right to profess a love to God, to perfect love, to holiness.

The existential emphasis on love demands a revolution of that which we have called love heretofore. Love as profound respect for ourselves in the wholly proper sense, and love to God as evidenced in the total devotement of all the capacities and areas of that self to Him can still be introspective, self-seeking and perverted if it be not poured out concretely into the lives of others. Love to God is tested and measured by our love to our neighbor.

### III. THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS' INTERPRETATION

It is a human trait that men should seek moral security in obedience. Were it not for Jesus' distinctive teaching, we could have been captured by a new legalism after having been

delivered from the old bondage to law. We would have been tempted to justify ourselves by external conformities and it is precisely to this error that Jesus addresses his interpretation. The uniqueness of His teaching is that it takes obedience out of the merely legalistic and moralistic realms and puts it into the realm of love--it is spiritualized. External standards are not obliterated, but love, driven inward, safeguards the vast areas of decision which cannot be covered by laws. The responsibility then rests upon the individual as he must nurture and strengthen his love and his understanding of God's will and men's needs.

It is reasonable to compare this passage of Scripture--Jesus' epitomy of the law, with the Sermon on the Mount--Jesus' commentary on the law. In neither case is the law abrogated but spiritualized. Obedience is not legalism, but the whole of life spiritualized. It is possible to perfectly obey the law and yet be carnal, materialistic, wooden, hard, loveless. But it is not possible to obey the law with the "mind of Christ" and do it on the basis of mere external conformity. Obedience, according to Jesus, becomes the living expression of the spiritual life. Legalism is negative, a refraining from evil and the measure of its sanctity is the power of restraint, renunciation, conformity. Jesus' spiritual interpretation includes also the positive--a new life lived out to the finger tips and springing from the deepest resources of a life in Christ.

The existential interpretation of the doctrine of holiness then includes two main emphases: First, attention to the verbal expression of doctrine as Biblically presented, by means of which a strict account may be kept of our stewardship; and second, attention to an adequate life expression of that doctrine in terms of a personal moral transformation demonstrated in life situations.

Sanctification is an act and a life. It is a crisis and a process. It is doctrine but it is doctrine in shoe leather, as well as on the books. Its beauty is not mainly in words, for words apart from vital living condemn it. Its loveliness and power is in a life lived out by the grace of God. Holiness can never be accepted, intellectually, as a philosophy of life, merely. It turns gangrenous apart from the constant flow of living blood out of the deepest heart. Sanctification does not provide character in a nice, neat bundle at an altar, but it clears the ground for character building and remains as a vital relationship to God so long as the recipient works the ground.

Holiness means something. It means everything. It means a beginning but it also means a continuing, and more than that,

it means a constantly augmented enlargement of love commensurate with the daily growth of human personality. It may begin in a small soul but no soul can remain small and retain it. It may begin in promises but it dies apart from the fulfillment of the promises that involve the stewardship of personality development in every area.

To be confronted by the doctrine of holiness is the same as being confronted by Christ, for his whole work was to restore us to the love and will of God. To be confronted by Christ is personal judgment. In Him the law is personified. In Him, all the demands of God crowd themselves upon us for immediate personal decision. The Bible does not leave us with a historical Christ, only. It confronts us with our living Lord, who cannot be heard by the intellect alone, nor be judged by the intellect, alone. He is heard by the whole man and will be accepted or rejected by the whole man in radical moral decision. To reject Him thus, however much one may retain an intellectual belief in Him, clouds the heart and darkens the light which illumines the pages of the Bible and makes of it mere words upon which men break fellowship. To accept Him involves the whole man in a moral revolution which transforms the very spring of life itself and thrusts His beauty into every area of a man's nature and service. Sanctification then, grows up with life, is co-extensive with life, is as dynamic as life for it is the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus.



## Beyond Absurdity

Earl E. Barrett

Soren Kierkegaard held that "the absurd is the object of faith," and the "only object that can be believed."<sup>1</sup> In line with this he viewed God's request to Abraham that he offer his son as a sacrifice a "preposterous" request.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this article is to question this interpretation of the Biblical account (Gen. 22:1-14), and to note the implications of such a position. Did Kierkegaard realize the consequences of calling the request absurd? The word means: "opposed to manifest truth or propriety, inconsistent with reason or common sense, unworthy of serious consideration, logically contradictory, irrational, grotesque, ridiculous, foolish, idiotic, insane, ill-advised, ill-considered, preposterous, senseless, silly, stupid, wild, worthy to be laughed at."<sup>3</sup> Whether he chose the proper word when he selected "absurd" remains to be seen.

As to viewpoint, this article is concerned with the general position of SK (following a custom quite general, using this abbreviation here and subsequently for Soren Kierkegaard) only as it reflects upon the problem, which is approached by way of Arminianism. It is recognized that the greatness of a man is seen in his power to stimulate thought, both favorable and adverse. Biblical quotations are from the American Standard Version and used by permission of the copyright owners, The National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. The American-Scandinavian Foundation grants the right of quoting from the works of SK and from Bretall, R., A Kierkegaard Anthology.<sup>4</sup>

### *Does not Making an Absurd Request Render One Unreasonable?*

Are the implications of this anything but serious? God, the World Ground irrational! Irrationality at the heart of the universe! It may be absurd to the point of being worthy to be laughed at, but the present writer is in no laughing mood. Thinking paralyzed! Confidence in reason destroyed! What difference, then, between the rich fool who "reasoned within himself" (Lk. 12:16-17), consulting his own dark, deceitful

<sup>1</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Princeton University Press, 1941, pp. 189, 194.

<sup>2</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Doubleday & Company, 1954, p. 35

<sup>3</sup>Funk & Wagnalls, *New Standard Dictionary*, 1951.

<sup>4</sup>R. Bretall, *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, Princeton University Press, 1946.

heart, and that of the wise man, who accepting the divine invitation, reasons in the presence of God (see Isa. 1:18)? What distinction, then, between the rational and the ridiculous in the thought of SK? But is not the Scripture emphatic on the rationality of God?

*If God's Request of Abraham Be Considered Absurd Because Unethical, Does This Not Imply That God is Unethical?*

Does not making an unethical request reveal an unholy nature? Is God presented in the Bible as unholy? It was Abraham himself who asked, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). And is there an essential bifurcation between religion and ethics? This SK implies: "If faith does not make it a holy act to be willing to murder one's son, then let the same condemnation be pronounced upon Abraham as upon every man."<sup>5</sup> Walter Kaufmann, seizing upon this as the central sentence in *Fear and Trembling*, charges SK with an anachronism: "He attributes to Abraham a rigid distinction between the religious and ethical order...attributing to Abraham a full-fledged ethical code entirely apart from his relation to God."<sup>6</sup> But the intimate relation between religion and morality traceable to the dawn of human logic<sup>7</sup> is a logical one: "The disappearance of the idea of God deprives the ideas of equality and justice of all justification."<sup>8</sup> That is, these norms presuppose a moral order.

Yet SK declares that Abraham "received the command to slay Isaac, a morally wrong act," and "by what may be called a temporary suspension of the ethical, he obeyed in virtue of his personal relation to God."<sup>9</sup> What is morally wrong in ethics, thus, becomes morally right in religion. A murderer, because of his religiosity, is still in right relations with a holy God. But if the moral and religious orders are united under one holy Ruler and Judge, is a moral holiday possible for God, or justifiable for man? Abraham's part in this "suspension" will come up later, when it will be seen that no "preposterous" implications are found in the untampered-with, historical record of the testing of Abraham. For now, we raise the question: if the tempted is a murderer, then what about the Tempter

<sup>5</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup>W. Kaufmann, "A Preliminary Expectoration," a paper read at the Western Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association, 1955.

<sup>7</sup>W. Urban, *Fundamentals of Ethics*, Henry Holt & Co., 1930, pp. 447, 449.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 450.

<sup>9</sup>H. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937, p. 233.

(God)? The thought is almost too horrible to entertain. Rationality irrationalized! Confusion confused! Universal rational and moral suicide!

*Was It, Then, Actually an Absurd Request?*

What is the answer of the immediate context? "And it came to pass...that God did prove Abraham." (Gen. 22:1) Although the King James Version has the broader term "tempt" (both "test" and "solicit to evil"), the present writer knows of no commentator who renders the Hebrew by "solicit to evil." Thus, what did God send Abraham to the mount for? To kill Isaac or to be tested?

What does the remote context say? The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself:

By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac; yea he...was offering up his only begotten son, even he to whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called; accounting that God is able to raise up, even from the dead; from whence he did also in a figure receive him back (Heb. 11:17).

Although "tried" can be taken literally, the expressions "was offered up," "from the dead...received him back," and "figure" indicate the figurative. A holy God does not solicit to evil; "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He himself tempteth no man" (Jas. 1:13). Consequently, that God can be tempted to suspend ethical requirements is too great an absurdity to become an object of faith to the present writer. But is it opposed to manifest truth that God tests faith? Is it absurd that great faith (such as Abraham had) should be tested by severe trial?

If the logically inseparable -- true religion and morality -- can be severed, if God can tempt to evil, and if clear Scripture can be ignored, then on the basis of SK's own premises, had Abraham actually sacrificed Isaac, why need Abraham have turned back "repentingly to the universal?"<sup>10</sup> With no evidence to bifurcate religion and ethics, SK employs his "either/or" paradox -- "either a murderer or a believer," a paradox "above all mediation,"<sup>11</sup> i. e., as baffling reason and outstripping all interpretation. Even had God solicited Abraham to sin, temptation is not sin or Jesus was not sinless. But "each man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust desire and enticed" (Jas. 1:14; see Gen. 3:6). It is only when desire (now having become desire for the forbidden) "hath conceived" that

<sup>10</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *op. cit.*, p. 67. <sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 77, 87.

it "beareth sin."<sup>12</sup> The Wesleyan tradition, therefore, is correct in locating sin in the intention, the will being drawn away by desire and surrendered to Satan. Neither in the remote nor immediate context is there the slightest hint that Abraham desired (to say nothing of intended) to murder his son. God seeing the heart, reads the motive. But SK appears to usurp this divine prerogative, putting into Abraham's heart hatred of Isaac and desire to slay him, which if actually there, makes Abraham a double murderer in God's sight (see I Jn. 3:15). A true "either/or," a Scriptural paradox is that Abraham could not have loved God and hated Isaac at the same time (see I Jno. 4:20).

Neither is there any warrant in Scripture or in ethical theory for saying that "in Abraham's life there is no higher expression for the ethical than this, that the father shall love his son."<sup>13</sup> In the whole history of ethics, there is the ever-recurring recognition of the three-fold duty of man to God, to others, and to self, the first being regarded as the highest.<sup>14</sup> Neither in Scripture nor in ethical theory is there proof that love to God, love to man, and love to self are inconsistent.<sup>15</sup> Love to God purifies and ennobles all other proper loves. It was not unethical for Abraham to love both God and Isaac. Abraham's dual love may be paradoxical, but it is the "both/and" type. The paradox can be "mediated,"<sup>16</sup> and rendered intelligible without resort to a moral holiday for anyone. With the ethical and the religious lifted up into the rational and holy nature of God, and resolved there in a truly Hegelian synthesis, we are not confronted with Abraham either as an ethical being or as a man of faith in the ridiculous sense of believing in virtue of the absurd. Although it would be unrighteous and unreasonable for a holy God to tempt a man, is it either unrighteous or unreasonable for God to test a man, or for a man to stand the test? Can we not admire Abraham without being "appalled?"<sup>17</sup> What can be more ethical and rational than conformity with absolute holiness. Absurdity enters with the thought that it is a sin to obey God.

*Did Abraham Regard the Request Made by God Absurd?*

In the immediate context do you see any hesitation, any

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, verse 15.

<sup>13</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>14</sup>W. Beach and R. Niebuhr, *Christian Ethics*, Ronald Press Company, 1955, pp. 117, 135, 402.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71.

questioning by Abraham? The words that "follow hard" upon the divine command are, "And Abraham rose up early in the morning" (Gen. 22:3). When Isaac asked, "Where is the lamb?" Abraham did not answer, "You are the lamb," but, "God will provide" (Gen. 22:7-8). If one's purpose is to eulogize Abraham as the great hero of faith, it can be done best by accepting the historical record instead of a substitute for it, and by accepting Abraham's "God will provide" as a noble expression of faith rather than as an evasive and hypocritical reply coming from a convulsed soul.

In the remote context do you see any evidence that Abraham regarded the divine request as unworthy of consideration? In his heathen environment human sacrifice, far from being thought unreasonable, was viewed as a proper practice.<sup>18</sup> However, a better explanation for Abraham's not considering the request a senseless demand is found in his new spiritual environment -- acquaintance with God. In the Genesis account, the soul of Abraham appears serene, strong and sound with the serenity, strength and soundness of true Biblical faith (see Rom. 5:1; II Tim. 1:7). But the soul of SK's Abraham is wrenched and convulsed by a request opposed to truth and propriety. Was not that soul, actually, the schizophrenic SK himself, projected, together with his "faith," into Abraham? The Hegelian concept of the rational as the whole would have helped SK at this point.

For the story of Abraham from his call to his testing was a record of knowledge -- the knowledge by acquaintance. Abraham's monotheism at the time of his call out of Ur, a polytheistic environment, can be explained only as the result of a revelation of God. And before the test, Abraham had seen prophecies fulfilled and miracles wrought, had witnessed theophanies, and had engaged in several conversations with his Friend. If faith is based on ignorance, as SK says,<sup>19</sup> then is Abraham not only not an outstanding example of faith, but he could not have believed God at all, for he (Abraham) knew too much. According to Christ, Abraham was way out ahead of his age in spiritual vision (see Jno. 8:56). Here is an Old Testament character with an almost New Testament tranquil faith that with God all things are possible. In Abraham's knowledge of God is there not enough reason to obey God?

Speaking of SK's self-projection into the record, which was "coupled with a range of experience which is far too narrow to permit significant generalizations," Kaufmann adds, "He

<sup>18</sup>See *Pulpis Commentary*, Funk & Wagnalls Company, no date, I, p. 646.

<sup>19</sup>R. Bretall, *op. cit.*, p. 220.



how no understanding of Abraham in Fear and Trembling... He always writes about himself.<sup>20</sup> Is the Abraham who "strove with God," "believed the preposterous," "knew that it is glorious to express the universal... a kingly thing to sacrifice such a son," "overstepped the ethical entirely," "hates Isaac" and "wants to sacrifice him," who "with wild eyes," "seized Isaac by the throat," and drawing the knife, said, "Thou did believe it was for God's sake I would do this, thou art mistaken, I am an idolater, this desire has again awakened in my soul, I want to murder thee,"<sup>21</sup> -- is this the historical Abraham, or a figment of SK's disordered imagination, SK himself? An abnormal, brooding, neurotic disposition from youth, a double guilt complex, a partial madness, a demonic-depression with suicidal tendencies, a sense of demon possession with accompanying delusions -- this is the self (better, the selves) projected into Abraham and Isaac.<sup>22</sup> So Abraham becomes the guilty father, with a guilty past crying for punishment; Isaac becomes the only son who must be sacrificed to atone for Abraham's (SK's father's) guilt.<sup>23</sup> Abraham becomes a dual personality; he is the "knight of faith" resigned to the will of God, and yet not resigned; losing Isaac (Regina) and yet holding on to him-her.<sup>24</sup> Probably his love for his father in spite of his dissoluteness was the view of how to love God which SK injected into the story of Abraham -- "without reason, overriding moral scruples, humbling himself lovingly before the utterly absurd."<sup>25</sup> There is no proof that the real Abraham considered God's request absurd.

*Did SK Himself Believe the Request Was Absurd? What Was SK's Purpose in His Extreme Statements?*

How seriously shall we take SK in the light of any one or all of his possible purposes in his extreme, paradoxical statements? First, what is a paradox? Meaning both "seemingly paradoxical" and "essentially false," the word itself is paradoxical. The former is the Hegelian paradox in which an apparent contradiction is resolved in a synthesis incorporating, or at least

<sup>20</sup>W. Kaufmann, *op. cit.*, p. 2; see Soren Kierkegaard, *op. cit.*, pp. 19, 48.

<sup>21</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 35, 87, 69, 84, 27.

<sup>22</sup>See Soren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, (Oxford University Press), 1939, p. 76; *Fear and Trembling*, pp. 27, 31; J. Hohlenberg, *Soren Kierkegaard*, Pantheon Books, 1954. H. Mackintosh, *op. cit.*, pp. 248-249, 221-223.

<sup>23</sup>See J. Hohlenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 41, 115, 119, 121; Soren Kierkegaard, *op. cit.*, pp. 78f.

<sup>24</sup>See Soren Kierkegaard, *Ibid.*, J. Hohlenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-116, 119-120.

<sup>25</sup>W. Kaufmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3; see Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread*, Princeton University Press, 1944, pp. 96-98; *Sickness unto Death*, Doubleday & Co., 19954, p. 208.



holding in balance, the truth of two extremes. The latter is the paradox of SK, an "either/or" relation in which the contradiction or seeming contradiction is left standing in stark, shocking opposition.<sup>26</sup>

Now, it is true that not all opposites can be reconciled. Aristotle saw that there is no "golden mean" in the morally bad, a little vice being altogether too much vice. Consequently, "either a murderer or a man of faith" is a proper paradox. The "either/or" opposition between the hero and the seducer in *Either/Or*<sup>27</sup> is also proper. But when SK, reacting violently against the Hegelian "both/and" paradox, applies his "either/or" to the relations of faith, reason, knowledge, subjectivity, objectivity, mediacy, and immediacy, it is a different matter.

For instance, from the present writer's experience as an attendant in V. A. neuropsychiatric hospitals, he knows that Nero and Napoleon are truly living today -- if truth and subjectivity are made one. Without objective reference, these deceived souls cannot know the truth, and without objective reference, we cannot know that they are deceived. If the only object of faith is the absurd, these are the great heroes of faith. If the greater the absurdity, the greater the faith, these are better examples than Abraham that "faith is wholly opaque and irrational."<sup>28</sup> SK had a great deal to say about insanity and asylums, for instance, "an asylum for the feeble-minded,"<sup>29</sup> but does not SK's concept of faith make the "realm of faith" the asylum for those cases of insanity where the most absurd things are believed and voices heard? And the Kierkegaardian criterion of truth is present -- the requisite intensity of the "passion of inwardness."<sup>30</sup> There is no reasoning with these patients. Attendants are told never to argue with a patient; "he is always right." Do you wonder that it is hard to believe that SK really thought that the only object of faith is the absurd, and that God's request was absurd.

Has not SK in his hatred of the Hegelian paradox gone too far in his reaction? Which of the following "both/and" paradoxes do you hate? 1) The transcendence and immanence of God, in which on the "either/or" basis the truth lies in either Deism or Pantheism, and not in Theism, the synthesis of the Hegelian paradox; 2) the sovereignty of God (thesis) and the freedom of man (antithesis), in which on the Kierkegaardian basis, the truth lies in either extreme Calvinism or Pelagianism, rather

<sup>26</sup>See R. Bretall, *op. cit.*, xxi-xxii.

<sup>27</sup>See Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Princeton University Press, 1944.

<sup>28</sup>H. Mackintosh, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

<sup>29</sup>Bretall, *op. cit.*, p. 231. - <sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 220.

than in Arminianism, the synthesis of the "both/and" dialectic; 3) the deity of Jesus and His humanity, which in SK's paradox has yielded the Christological heresies, but which in the Hegelian synthesis has given us the God-Man; 4) the divine Author and the human writer paradox, which viewed as Kierkegaardian, has produced erroneous theories of inspiration; but which in the Hegelian resolution of extremes, has resulted in the reasonable and Biblical theory of plenary and dynamic inspiration; 5) the activity of God and the activity of man, which following SK, makes the Bible self-contradictory, but which following Hegel, consummates in the full salvation of souls; 6) the conflicting relations of faith, reason, will, knowledge and certainty, which stand in violent opposition in SK's thinking, but which are harmonized in the "mediated-immediacy" of Hegel, and in the reconciliation of Mysticism, Rationalism, and Empiricism -- to repeat, do you hate these Hegelian resolutions of difference? Do you hold that the "both/and" paradox is "the way to hell"?<sup>31</sup>

If SK, contrary to appearance, did not mean to set subjectivity over against objectivity in unreasonable opposition, how better could he have stated his position than in the words of the hated rationalist? "Religious knowledge is essentially a mediated knowledge, but all the same it is not admissible to look in a one-sided way upon mere mediated knowledge as being real and true."<sup>32</sup> For Hegel, using the term "immediate" for the knowledge derived from God's giving of Himself to man by coming into direct relation with him, calls for a synthesis of the two kinds of knowledge, which apart, are "one-sided abstractions."<sup>33</sup> Is this unchristian? Are not the rival claims of faith, feeling, reason, will, knowledge and certainty resolved in experience and in the Word? For instance, are faith and knowledge exclusive -- in experience and in the Bible? "I know (present) whom I have believed" (perfect in Greek), the belief of the past continuing into the present, parallel to knowledge (II Tim. 1:12). Paul did not cease being a believer when he became a knower. And in the earliest and purest age of the Christian Church, the claims of reason and faith were only apparently in conflict, for the reason honored was not the reason limited by human infirmity, clouded by human sin, and unaided by the Holy Spirit and the Bible; and the faith made central was not credulity, nor absurdity, nor belief unsupported by rational foundation and unrelated to certainty. For faith

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup>G. Hegel, *Philosophy of Religion*, Keagan, Paul, French, Trubner & Co., 1895, II, p. 164.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

was founded on reason, and reason on faith. Thus, a believing reason and a reasonable faith were harmonized in true un-Kierkegaardian fashion.

We conclude this introduction to the possible purposes of SK in making such absurd remarks about Abraham and God by asking with Paul Tillich, "What is wrong with the Dialectical Theology"? and by answering with him, "It is not dialectic. A dialectical theology is one in which 'yes' and 'no' belong inseparably together. In the so-called 'dialectic' theology they are irreconcilably separated."<sup>34</sup> What, then, are the possible purposes of SK in making his extreme statements?

Was his purpose to arrest attention? Newman, asked why his attack upon Kingsley had been so violent, replied, "'Had I said these things in ordinary tones, no one would have taken the least notice.'"<sup>35</sup> Did SK create absurdities to shock his readers into attention?

Or, was it his purpose to give offense?

That Kierkegaard with his prolific contempt for parsons and professors should at long last have been translated into English largely by a parson and a professor, that is ironical... But that a man who wanted to... be an offense should be praised... without offending anybody, that is tragic.<sup>36</sup>

Admitting that as a stylist, religious writer, psychologist and philosopher, SK is remarkable, Kaufmann declares however, that in all four respects SK is offensive. Was his offensiveness deliberate?

Or, shall we say that it was his purpose to create difficulties? In dealing with the problem of becoming a Christian, SK felt it his duty "to make its solution as difficult as possible."<sup>37</sup> In SK's concept of extreme transcendence, Hugh Mackintosh sees an eagerness to make difficulties. With deliberate purpose "to create difficulties everywhere," SK succeeded.<sup>38</sup> His first book puzzled his own townspeople.<sup>39</sup> Not only is it difficult to determine his purpose, but one wonders whether there are not two faiths and two reasons—one to believe the absurd, and one to believe rational propositions (which, if above reason are not against it); one reason with purpose to

<sup>34</sup>P. Tillich, "What is Wrong with the Dialectical Theology," *Journal of Religion*, April 1935, p. 127.

<sup>35</sup>H. Mackintosh, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

<sup>36</sup>W. Kaufmann, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup>H. Mackintosh, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

<sup>38</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 166.

<sup>39</sup>J. Hohlenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

darken and obscure fairly clear and reasonable things, the other to render clear and reasonable, things that are unclear and apparently unreasonable. As Edward Carnell puts it: "What is the place of reason in the test of truth? Kierkegaard answers: 'Reason has the assignment of searching out what things are offensive...and of exhibiting how absurd the offensive really is.'"<sup>40</sup>

Can it be that SK was guided by contempt of Philosophy? Did his generalized emotional attitude, which causes irrational responses cloud his understanding of the nature and function of philosophy in general, and particularly that of Socrates? For Socrates did have faith, including faith in God and immortality; and contrary to SK, Socrates got beyond faith to knowledge, a knowledge so remarkable that the present writer can account for it only by virtue of Socrates' acquaintance either with the Hebrew Scriptures or with the primitive revelation to our first parents, if he was not divinely inspired.<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps, then, the philosophers of SK's day, who like Socrates, were not "content to stop with faith," made it as did Anselm, a means to an end -- understanding or knowledge.<sup>42</sup> While, therefore, the methods of philosophy and religion differ, the former stressing reason, the latter, faith; yet is it not true that "Without faith, it (philosophy, religion, science, everything) is impossible" (Heb. 11:6)? True, philosophers hold with Socrates that the unexamined life is not worth living, employing the tools of criticism, yet the present writer can recall no philosopher who has made "light of faith."<sup>43</sup> Having faith, there is no reason why, contrary to SK, "philosophy cannot and should not give faith."<sup>44</sup> Yet SK's individualism is of so extreme a type as largely to disqualify him from understanding actual religion. There is no sense of any kind, he asserts categorically, in which faith can pass from one life to another.<sup>45</sup> Here fellowship in family and church mean nothing.

Or, was SK led on by hatred of Hegelianism? As already Either/Or was SK's reaction against the famous Hegelian paradox of the thesis, antithesis and their synthesis which "includes and somehow reconciles them both, "for which SK had already

<sup>40</sup>E. Carnell, *Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1952, p. 484, on Soren Kierkegaard, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>41</sup>I. Edman, *The Works of Plato*, Random House, 1928, p. 106; Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, pp. 37, 79; Clement, *Stromata*, Bk. I, The Christian Literature Co., 1885, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 44. <sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup>H. Mackintosh, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

acquired an unyielding hatred.<sup>46</sup> Mackintosh describes SK as one "who indignantly resents all efforts to bring faith and speculation into agreement."<sup>47</sup> Somehow SK drew an analogy between his failure to reconcile his engagement with the will of God, and his failure to reconcile Christianity with Hegelianism, at least as it was expounded by Danish thinkers.<sup>48</sup>

Was it SK's purpose to balance up the thought of his day? It has been suggested that SK made extreme statements in order to swing the pendulum, as it were, from one extreme to the other. It is Bretall's view that SK meant that one should not enter the Kingdom by the easy and attractive way -- the speculative way, i.e., "as sanctioned by human reason, for the 'reasonableness of Christianity' is treason ... because it subjects the self revelation of the infinite God to finite human standards."<sup>49</sup> But here SK has confused "sanctioned" with "motivated." Christian ethical writers, recognizing that the weightiest sanctions of morality are the religious ones, hold that one should not be moral merely in view of rewards and punishments.

But the effects of SK's extreme positions are procured at a great price; "he induces new distortions of belief so violent and perverse as gravely to imperil our hold on the New Testament concept of God and the life His children are called to lead."<sup>50</sup> SK, like the original "mad" Dane, Hamlet, recognized the presence of the dangerous in himself.<sup>51</sup> Should not SK, then, in fairness have given us the same advice Hamlet gave: "Yet have I in me something dangerous, which let thy reason fear."<sup>52</sup>

Was SK Unconsciously Led Into Fallacious Thinking?

Finally, we raise the question whether SK, instead of being purposive, was betrayed by fallacious thinking into making extreme, contradictory statements. The present writer has detected the following fallacies: definition, obfuscation, composition, dictosimpliciter, false conversion, black and white, and contradictory propositions. Of these, only the first two will be considered.

William James has pointed out that to define a word (for instance, "barber") in such a way as to preclude its meaning

<sup>46</sup>J. Hohlenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 19; see *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>47</sup>H. Mackintosh, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 136, 139-140.

<sup>49</sup>R. Bretall, *op. cit.*, p. xxiii.

<sup>50</sup>H. Mackintosh, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

<sup>51</sup>J. Hohlenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 60, 80, 116, 135, 203.

<sup>52</sup>W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Ginn & Co., 1930, Act 5, Scene 2, pp. 285-286, quoted from the Kittredge edition by permission.



anything else (as "hunter") is the vice of intellectualism; it could be called the fallacy of definition.<sup>53</sup> If it is true that a believer is doomed by definition not to be also a knower, would it not paralyze discovery, invention, and progress of all kind? If the scientist has no rational grounds, no evidence of any kind for his hypothesis, would he take the time and trouble to demonstrate it? If what we believe cannot be probable, not even possible, would anyone seek God (Heb. 11:6; Rom. 10:17)? If this faith which obviously is a means to an end -- God, knowledge of Him, likeness to Him and fellowship with Him -- if this faith can not be influenced by any thought that God possibly exists, will anyone be moved to attempt a spiritual demonstration? If one has to fly in the face of all evidence and rationality, must believe the absurd in order to believe at all, will anyone likely make the "absurd" approach to God, who by definition is absurd (the only object of faith being the absurd)? Does one, thus, have to "park" reason on the outside in order to enter the Kingdom? SK went too far, beyond the Word, in laying down conditions for entrance into the Kingdom of God.

It is doubtful whether SK fell into the fallacy of obfuscation; he seems to have dived into it. He appears, as has been seen, deliberately to have darkened and made things more difficult.

Accepting Hegel's point that simple propositions are not enough, instead of continuing with Hegel that what is needed is analysis or comprehension, SK asks for passion: What our age lacks is not reflection but passion.<sup>54</sup> Kaufmann, quoting SK that "the conclusions of passion are the only reliable ones,"<sup>55</sup> comments: "Confronted with belief in a proposition, Hegel, as a philosopher, asks, 'what does it mean?' SK, as a moralist, asks, 'are you willing to die for it?' My attitude proves nothing about my proposition, only something about me."<sup>56</sup> Carnell illustrates passion's acting in defiance of reason:

Suppose that a person, having generated enough passion to act in opposition to the understanding, concludes, 'My understanding tells me that this is a porcupine, but I passionately believe that this is my loving wife.' If he existentially acts upon this urge, the results will be interesting. The porcupine will be perplexed, the wife greatly resentful, and the individual filled with quills. In any case the terminal value could hardly commend itself to a person who remembers he

<sup>53</sup>W. James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, Longman's, Green & Co., 1909, pp. 218-219.

<sup>54</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, *op. cit.*, p. 53. <sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>56</sup>W. Kaufmann, *op. cit.*, pg. 9.



is made in the image of God.<sup>57</sup>

In conclusion, let us review in proper "either/or" fashion some questions raised in this discussion, leaving the choice between them "up to the reader the 'existing individual' for whom alone the choice can have significance."<sup>58</sup> In view of the several possible purposes, and the several actual fallacies of SK in making the extreme statements reviewed, did or did not he himself hold that God made an absurd request of Abraham? In the light of the historical facts, did or did not Abraham believe that the request was absurd? Can or cannot a rational and holy God make an absurd and unethical request and still remain God?

<sup>57</sup>E. Carnell, *op. cit.*, p. 475.

<sup>58</sup>R. Bretall, *op. cit.*, pp xxi-xxii.

# Kierkegaard And Jeremiah

G. Herbert Livingston

The mission and message of the Hebrew prophet, (especially the writing prophets) have been one of the most troublesome problems of Old Testament study. Almost all of the reliable Biblical scholars are quick to admit the uniqueness and superiority of Israel's religion over that of all her contemporaries, and, more specifically, that the writing prophets stand in a category all their own. But much controversy has raged about the question: why were they different and what factors brought their uniqueness into existence? The problem is still marked by much disagreement among scholars.

The purpose of this paper is not to super-impose the theories of the Danish writer, Kierkegaard, upon the problem, nor will the entirety of Kierkegaard's point of view be used in this paper. The aim is to limit the study to one phase of his teaching, namely, the possibility of the God-relationship, and to compare or contrast his description of it with whatever data we find in the prophetic writings concerning the prophet's own religious experience. Since the greater part of this data is limited to the book of Jeremiah, the study will not concern itself (for reasons of space) with scattered items to be found elsewhere.

The procedure of the paper is three-fold: First, a cursory survey of the various types of prophecy found in the Old Testament, together with various theories advanced by important scholars regarding the reasons for and the nature of the "prophetic religious consciousness" of the writing prophets. Secondly, a condensed description will be attempted of what Kierkegaard meant by the possibility of the God-relationship and its actualization. Finally this description will be tested upon the raw material of the personal religious experience as found in the book of Jeremiah.

The difficulties involved in such a project are not small. In the first place, Kierkegaard never applied his principles to the religious experience of the prophets. The greater part of his concern was with setting forth the essential nature of Christianity. The only times he turned to the Old Testament were in a short treatment of Job in Repetition, and of Abraham and Isaac in Fear and Trembling. Hence the difficulties of formulating accurately from these several instances the principles which can be universally applied, together with the difficulties of applying these principles to a new instance of religious ex-

perience in a manner sufficiently objective so as not to prejudice the study in advance, are great. Every effort will be made to guard against the dangers involved.

#### I. WHENCE THE WRITING PROPHET

The important point here is the source of the writing prophet's unique religious experience and its expression. The common approach has been to trace all origins to antecedent immanent factors in the social, economic, political, and cultic structure of the past and to view the new as a mediation or synthesis brought into actuality by some great cataclysm in the social or political realm.

T. H. Robinson applied to this problem a dialectic which he used as the framework of his treatment of the history of Israel.<sup>1</sup> He threw the nomad and peasant cultures over against each other and as these two opposites interacted during the Conquest to bring about an official religion of Jahwe-Baalism, so in the eighth century following, the nomadic Rechabites, Nazarites, and nomad-shepherd clans rebelled against the official cult because the dislocated social conditions, and the rising threat of Assyrian power, served to reveal its impasse and demanded a new and fresh interpretation of religion.

Unlike the Rechabites and Nazarites, Amos saw that the solution was not a repudiation of civilization but of paganized ritual. By a new application of the moral principles of the nomad to the nature of God he was able to hold for the first time that God's character was ethically consistent and not capricious; this was universally significant. Hosea added to this the concept of love, and Isaiah added the concept of holiness and righteousness. This new concept of God as supremely righteous gave birth to the reform under Josiah and its repudiation of foreign cults. T. H. Robinson felt that the movement behind this was from an ecstatic type of experience to that of great religious thinking.

Adolphe Lods followed the same pattern but with more detail. The prophet saw that the social corruption needed punishment "due chiefly to the acknowledgement of their own conscience."<sup>2</sup> In reacting to this social condition the prophet demanded moral as well as social reformation. They entirely rejected the common ritual with its magical content, and taking a cue from popular eschatology, they turned the expected day of victory into a day of doom. They hammered the semi-ethical monotheism of the Orient, which centered about the national

<sup>1</sup>T. H. Robinson, *History of Israel*, Vol. I.

<sup>2</sup>A. Lods, *Prophecy and Rise of Judaism*, p. 63.

God, into a new concept of a God of absolute justice. Henri Berr has interpreted *Lods* as meaning that 'the type of progress was "from man to creator, from chosen to the God who set his choice upon them, Israel arrived at an ethical monotheism."<sup>3</sup>

But this was not the end, for men like Jeremiah and Ezekiel acted as new synthesizers. Influenced by Josiah's reform they endeavored to fuse the narrow nationalism of the past with the new universal monotheism. This synthesis of traditional religion with its ritual, and the prophetic teaching with its moral content, gave rise to a new type of religion called Judaism.

It is to be noted that in all of this the personal religious consciousness of the prophet, as being God-ordained to give a divine message, is given little place. *Lods* acknowledged this claim, but dismissed it by saying that it was largely the rising of the unconscious to the level of the conscious.<sup>4</sup>

A more recent writer, Harold Knight, takes a different line of approach, believing that the origin of the writing prophet must be traced back through the magical and divinatory aspects of the work of such men as Balaam, Samuel, and Elijah. He rejected Jepsen's theory that a study of ecstatic prophecy would reveal the secrets of the prophetic experience by saying that ecstatic prophecy was not native to the Hebrew but came from the Canaanite and Hittite cultures and never was favorably received in Israel. In fact, it was contrary to the general psychology of the Hebrew prophet.<sup>5</sup>

The ecstatic views the body as a limitation and desires to rise, through suspension of normal consciousness, to a merger or absorption into the Absolute, thus obliterating the personality of the prophet. This can be attained by mechanical means. The experience is brought about for its own sake and has no concern for the historical and concrete.

In contrast to this, the Hebrew prophet never cultivated an ecstatic experience nor found the physical, the historical, or the concrete, a liability. The initiation of the prophet's experience was wholly on God's side and filled the prophet with dread and awe. Throughout, the personality of the prophet was expressed in terms of a fellowship, not an absorption. His message was communicable and directed in an intelligible manner to some particular occasion in life.

On the grounds of such divergences, Knight rejected ecstasy as the matrix of Hebrew prophecy and turned to other possible sources. He thought he found the answer in divination. Samuel was the true forefather of it all. He was neither a *nabi*, nor a

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, Intro. by Henri Berr, p. xxiii. <sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 57, 58.

<sup>5</sup>Harold Knight, *The Hebrew Prophetic Consciousness*, pp. 19-52.

priest, but a diviner. His messages came by audition and his oracles were directed to the situation at hand. His personality was still retained and there was a consciousness of an Other set over against him. Its core was the hearing of a supernatural voice.

Thus, both Elijah and Elisha, according to Knight, were not prophets, but rain-makers and magicians, with something of the ecstatic creeping in. Knight has felt therefore, that the Hebrew prophetic consciousness was the spiritual flowering of divination and the religious transformation of primitive magic. And yet, he has acknowledged a sharp cleavage between the prophet and the diviner.<sup>6</sup> Whereas the magician often exercised his technique quite independent of religious experience, (in fact, it was rooted in personal desire and was a defiant coercion of God) the prophet was a prophet because he had received a divine commission, not because he used certain techniques. He prophesied because he was obedient to God and not because he had bent the Divine will in line with his own wishes.

In view of this, one wonders how there can be any real connection with magic at all. Evidently Knight has his secret doubts, too, for in the next chapter he has suggested that the real source of the writing prophet's message was rational inference and calculation, and differed from all earlier types as a lower consciousness differs from a higher consciousness. The writing prophet possessed that spiritual insight which belongs to a higher level of spiritual development than that which belongs to the ecstatic, the magician, or the court prophet.<sup>7</sup>

Knight has concluded by saying that the writing prophet possessed three distinctive things: a moral and spiritual fellowship with God, a genuine hearing of God's Words, and an authentic commission to speak in His name. Above all they were required to make a personal venture of faith.<sup>8</sup> Yet in an effort to explain the psychology of such an experience, Knight has admitted that he thinks that it was identical with that of an inspired musician, poet, or artist, and that the prophet reached his insight by way of a value judgement.<sup>9</sup>

Another recent writer, E. W. Heaton, has approached the matter in much the same way but has been concerned mostly with the difference between the court prophet and the writing prophet. He held that their distinguishing mark was that the court prophet conducted regular consultations as to what they were to say, whereas the writing prophet and the writing

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 43-52. <sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 70-78. <sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 78-80. <sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.



conscience and impulse.<sup>10</sup> Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha stood halfway between these two types. The inner core of the writing prophet's experience was their own consciousness of an intensified spiritual and moral awareness, in which a direct communication with God was prominent. Because of this, they possessed great moral seriousness. But, as to origins, he asserted that these men stood in the tradition of Moses and of the nomadic community of the desert. On the whole, Heaton recognized the uniqueness of the writing prophet's experience and tried to be objective in explaining it as unique.

Of like temper, N. W. Porteous<sup>11</sup> has published a keen and a concise statement on Hebrew prophecy.

Also to be mentioned is a recent book by Martin Buber. The main thesis of this book is that the prophetic faith had its roots in the very earliest stages of the history of the faith, namely with the Fathers. This faith centered about the relation between the God of Israel and Israel. In no way, Buber has said, is the nature of this reality altered by later writers. To be on the safe side as far as literary criticism is concerned, he began with the Song of Deborah and noted three core aspects of the God-Israel relationship which he traced back to the patriarchs and forward to the prophets. These key affirmations are: (a) Jahwe is Israel's God and Israel is Jahwe's people, (b) if Israel acts so as to fulfill its destiny, then Jahwe would be blessed, (c) Jahwe leads Israel and goes before them. They must willingly follow, thus the important point is to love Jahwe. He then has proceeded to show that in essence the prophetic experience, in whatever age, is dialogic in nature, with God showing himself as person to man and man being a person before God.<sup>12</sup>

Because of the position of these last few men, it is hoped that a consideration of the prophetic religious experience in the light of the Kierkegaardian concept of the God-relationship will not be entirely amiss. In order to gain a proper perspective, we will examine Kierkegaard first.

## II. KIERKEGAARD'S CONCEPT OF THE GOD-RELATIONSHIP

To understand fully what Kierkegaard meant by the God-relationship, one must view it from two different angles. This is not because God changes but because there resides in man a possibility of change -- of becoming. The two aspects of the God-man relationship hinges upon the "leap of faith". But

<sup>10</sup>E. W. Heaton, *His Servants the Prophets*, pp. 23-35.

*Servants the Prophets*, pp. 23-35.

<sup>11</sup>N. W. Porteous, "Prophecy" in *Record and Revelation*, edited by H. W. Robinson, pp. 216-230.

<sup>12</sup>Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith*, pp. 1-12.



before lifting up the various factors which surround this "leap" it may be best to briefly set forth what is meant by the two parties to this relationship, namely, the Absolute, and the individual, or Individual.

For Kierkegaard the Absolute is synonymous with the term, God. This One is qualitatively different than man, a "Wholly Other", who is transcendent and unconditioned. This does not mean that God is an abstraction, impassive and wholly removed from relationship with man. It is precisely this very thing that Kierkegaard so strenuously fought. For him God is passionate, is desirous of a relationship with man, with whom there is kinship because of creation. He rejected any intimation that God is merely a Universal, and thus impersonal. Kierkegaard failed to see any room or necessity for Christianity if such is the case. God is more than a Universal, He is a Person, hidden from the searching fingers of logic and manifest only to those who choose to stand before Him as persons. He stressed this strongly in the conclusion of The Point of View, where, in throwing the crowd over against the Individual, he says that the crowd excludes the personal and therefore God, "for the personal God cannot be a middle term in an impersonal relationship."<sup>13</sup> He did not mean by this statement that the Universal is rejected, but that a proper relationship is established. As he succinctly pointed out, "The Individual here determines his relation to the universal by his relation to the absolute and not his relation to the absolute by his relation to the universal."<sup>14</sup>

The other party to the relationship is the individual man. It is not the aim of this paper to discuss Kierkegaard's anthropology except to stress those items which deal specifically with the concept of relationship. It is necessary to understand however that Kierkegaard did not believe that a proper relationship between God and man naturally exists. Rather, as he insisted in The Point of View, the whole aim of his authorship was centered about the problem of how one may achieve a proper relationship with God, or more specifically, "how to become a Christian".<sup>15</sup> To achieve this aim he felt he must stress a category largely overlooked by Christendom, the category of the Single Individual. He felt that unless this point was "spotlighted" there was no room for a change in the human situation and no redemption.

<sup>13</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, pp. 41-43.

<sup>14</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, p. 100.

<sup>15</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 120.

There are two types of individuals: the one who is but a member of a crowd, the "established order", and therefore not a real person, and the type who is an Individual, the "Single One" before God. The determinant here being the phrase, "before God". This last type, which is of itself beyond man's power to attain, is the category of the spirit and the decisive Christian category. Upon it Christianity stands or falls. As a Single Individual one is alone, alone in the whole world, alone before God. This is the highest pinnacle of the soul. This meager description is sufficient for the time being, but more will be said of it later.

The first stage in establishing of a proper relationship is the call or invitation of the Absolute on the one hand, and the awakening, or "being brought to awareness", on the other. Kierkegaard also called it the category of "interest." In Fear and Trembling interest is described as the boundary category on the confines of aesthetics and ethics and about which they are rarely concerned. Aesthetics and ethics are not concerned because this interest is not oriented toward the past, per se, but toward the present.<sup>16</sup> In Training In Christianity "interest" is set in terms of contemporaneity. In summary, it may be said that in relation to the Absolute there is only one tense--the present. Unless the claims and judgements of God are set before us in terms of present existence, they are not vital.<sup>17</sup>

Interest is also closely allied to the category, repetition, for in Repetition, Kierkegaard contrasted it with recollection and said that whereas recollection is concerned with the past, repetition is concerned with the future, a future stoutly bound with the present. "Repetition is reality, and it is the seriousness of life. He who wills repetition is matured in seriousness."<sup>18</sup> Seriousness here being a very marked trait of "interest."

In the "calling", or "awakening", of the member of a crowd to be an Individual is found other psycho-spiritual traits which we cannot more than mention. Such categories are dread, despair, guilt-consciousness, sin-consciousness.

But we are concerned more with the way the proper God-relationship is attained. The movement involved is from "outwardness" to "inwardness". The characteristics of outwardness are: the comic, fantasy, and frivolity. The characteristics of inwardness are: interest, seriousness, freedom, and the possibility of repetition which may lead to faith. The move-

<sup>16</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, pp. 120-147.

<sup>17</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, pp. 1-78.

<sup>18</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, p. 6.

ment from outward to inward is called the movement of infinite resignation in Fear and Trembling and is described as a human activity which brings one to the threshold of faith but does not necessarily end in faith. "A man can become a tragic hero by his own strength, but he can never by his own strength become a knight of faith."<sup>19</sup> Or, as described in another place, it is, "a religious movement by virtue of the absurd ... when one has arrived at the borders of the marvelous."<sup>20</sup> This brings a person to two categories that are thrown over against each other, faith and the absurd, (the paradox or the possibility of offense). "Faith is contained in a fragile earthen vessel, in the possibility of offense."<sup>21</sup>

One of the clearest definitions of what this particular paradox is, is found in The Sickness Unto Death where it is said, "It lies in the fact that a man, as a particular individual, should have such a reality as is implied by existing directly in the sight of God; and then again, and as a consequence of this, that a man's sin should concern God."<sup>22</sup> The absurd also rests in the fact that at the threshold of the marvelous, the understanding is brought to a halt so that if there is to be any carrying through of repetition--of becoming, there must be a setting aside of all ideational processes. For here reason, or logic, cannot reign supreme; it is too rigid. Rather, passion must take over for in the establishing of proper personal relationships, passion alone is mobile enough to make the transition. In Training in Christianity it is asserted that what really offends is the endless passion with which eternal blessedness is conceived, corresponding to the endless fear of offense. "But at the absolute the understanding stands still--it is arrested at the demand to dedicate one's whole life as a sacrifice."<sup>23</sup>

Kierkegaard regarded faith as both a miracle and a passion. "Faith is a miracle, yet no one is excluded from it; for passion is common to all men, and faith is a passion,"<sup>24</sup> or "Faith is objective uncertainty due to the repulsion of the absurd held fast by the passion of inwardness."<sup>25</sup> When this act of faith has been accomplished, the absoluteness of the God-relationship has been brought into actuality.

Much that has been said concerning the final stages of

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, Introduction, pp. xx-xxxiv.

<sup>21</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, p. 80.

<sup>22</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, p. 133.

<sup>23</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 122.

<sup>24</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, p. 95.

<sup>25</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 540.

"becoming" can also be said of the continuation of the God-relationship. As long as the Individual is caught within the confines of existence there is a certain precariousness about his position before God. Always there stands before him the possibility of faith and the possibility of offense, and in each new trial of life he must make his decision anew. Hence the characteristic of the God-relationship is that of "fear and trembling."

Continually, man is put to the test as to whether he is willing to wholly renounce all things, even himself, and, continually, man is faced with the paradox of how to relate his absolute relation with the Absolute, with the finite. This arises from the fact that faith has integral to it a movement which is the opposite of renunciation. In Fear and Trembling, Kierkegaard has maintained that faith renounces nothing, it receives everything. "Here everything turns upon the temporal and the finite, and the finite. With my own strength I can renounce everything, and find peace and rest in suffering--but by my own strength I cannot obtain the least of the things which belong to the finite."<sup>26</sup> As applied to Abraham, it meant, "It was not by faith that Abraham renounced Isaac, but by faith that Abraham obtained Isaac."<sup>27</sup>

A more adequate treatment of this concept is given in Concluding Unscientific Postscript. Here the position is taken that one may be removed from existence either by abstraction or by passion--but that passion alone has the impulse toward existing again. "The task therefor is to exercise myself in the relationship to the absolute telos so as to always to have it with me, while remaining in the relativities of life."<sup>28</sup> One Absolute but in no distinct outwardness. He must live in life as other men, in a sort of incognito. Such a one still lives in the finite, but he does not have his life in it. "The maximum attainment is to simultaneously sustain an absolute relationship to the absolute end, and a relative relationship to relative end."<sup>29</sup>

Obviously there is stress and strain to this sort of thing. Therefore, the chief outward expression for the God-relationship is that of suffering, for the pathos of the problem is the expression of this relationship in the medium of existence.

Since being an "exister" involves relationships with other people, "the established order", there arises certain characteristic traits of the pathos of the believer. One of these traits is silence. Abraham was silent because he could not speak, he could not speak because he could not be understood. In this silence he asserted himself as an Individual in contrast to the

<sup>26</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 66. <sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 68. <sup>28</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 365. <sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 311.

Universal, and the silence was filled with suffering because he was still faced with the demands of ethics. He could not be understood because he had asserted the right of the Individual to be higher than that of the Universal. Likewise, Christ could not be understood because his own claims to an unique relationship to the Father placed the "established order" in jeopardy.

Pathos is further heightened because of a new type of paradox. The Individual suffers the more intensely because he does not have to suffer, it is entirely voluntary, "the possibility of offense consists precisely in the fact that it is the believer who is regarded by the world as a criminal."<sup>30</sup> Yet at any time he can clear himself of the charge by renouncing the absoluteness of his God-relationship.

Even though the Individual may desire to be a communicator of the truth he holds so dear, and may behold his neighbor with great love, he can never be sure of a favorable response. In his collision with the established order, he may discover that others are offended with the audacity of his religious claims; they may misunderstand him, they may endeavor to force on him the demands of the "Order", they may utterly reject him. He can only prick them to awareness, and leave them in the valley of decision. Because of his own helplessness in that hour, he suffers.

### III. THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

What then of the prophet? Is there any correlation between the concept just described and the religious experience of the prophet. As noted before, the prophet Jeremiah is selected here for examination because his writings contain more data on the inner life of the prophet than does that of any of the others.

Jeremiah lived in a crucial hour in the history of Israel. The little city of Jerusalem was caught in the center of the stress and strain of international politics. Babylon was out to conquer the world, and Egypt had like ambitions. The kingdom of Judah lay as a sort of buffer state between the two. In Jerusalem the established order (centered about the throne and the temple) had become rigid. The economic structure was closely bound with Egyptian commerce. The religious life was anchored in the Temple and all the outward forms of its worship ceremonies. It was not generally understood by the leaders and the people that the ominous political clouds on the horizon spelled doom for the little city. How could it when the great power of friendly Egypt was close at hand? And would God allow His own city to

<sup>30</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, pp. 122.



be destroyed? The future appeared to be secure--had not the court prophets said so?

In opposition to all this were individuals who felt differently. The most prominent among them was Jeremiah. Why did he take such a bold and dangerous stand against the weighty opinion of the "powers-that-be"? A quick survey will show us certain things which explains the "why".

An important factor was the conviction that he had received a divine call, a mission and a message. God had said:

Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth from the womb I sanctified thee, I have appointed thee--I shall send thee--I shall command thee--Behold I have put my words in thy mouth; see, I have--set thee.<sup>31</sup> (Jer. 1:5-10).

Here the initiative was Divine and was set forth as a claim and a command. Almost nothing is given as an inner description of this experience. The account implies that it had never happened to the prophet before and utterly changed the prophet's life from that moment on. Closely associated with this call is a later verse:

Therefore saith Jehovah, If thou return, then will I bring thee again, that thou mayest stand before me. (15:19) These words have all the earmarks of a creative and transforming act. As Buber has said:

The contact between Godhead and manhood in his view is not bound up with rite but with word--He who speaks is incomprehensible, irregular, surprising, overwhelming, sovereign.<sup>32</sup>

It is a word from heaven and makes its abode within man. This is closely akin to what Kierkegaard meant by the contemporaneity of Christ in the first section of Training in Christianity and his insistence that the Absolute is in the present tense. The encounters with the "Other" in Jeremiah's call and later prayers are certainly in the present tense.

Another thing to note is the manner in which the relationship with God was expressed. Even A. C. Knudson admits "that as a prophet he stood in an intimate relation to God, and that this relationship was a matter of vital religious concern". And in another place, "He made its religion's essential nature to consist in personal fellowship with God. This implies the ascription of new importance to the individual."<sup>33</sup> Buber elaborated further, "He to whom and by whom the word is spoken, is in

<sup>31</sup>All quotes from Bible are from American Standard Version.

<sup>32</sup>Martin Buber, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

<sup>33</sup>A. C. Knudson, *Beacon Lights of Prophecy*, both quotes from p. 164.



the full sense of the word a person".<sup>34</sup> Thus God becomes a person to man and man must be made a person before Him. In such a situation the human person can answer, lament, complain, etc.

"All Israelite relationships of faith are dialogic; here the dialogue has reached its pure form--Man speaks, he is permitted to speak; if only he truly speaks to God, there is nothing he may not say to Him."<sup>35</sup>

Jeremiah's religious experience was thoroughly personal in its relationships with God. But it is also an important point in Kierkegaard's concept, for he held that man does not become a nonentity but a person, the Individual, when he stands before God. At no time is he more a man than in that moment.

There are things of the absurd, or the paradoxical, in the experience of Jeremiah too. Even in the account of the call, we find the prophet sensing the incongruity of the call coming to him, "Behold I know not how to speak, for I am a child" (1:6). It was a barrier to his understanding. He was overwhelmed by his own littleness and the greatness of the task to which God had appointed him.

The basic paradox or dilemma which faced Jeremiah was revealed to him in a vision. He was, God said, faced with two unpleasant courses of action either of which involved suffering. Refusal to perform God's will would bring to him divine punishment, or, as it is stated, "be not dismayed at them, lest I dismay thee before them" (1:17b). On the other hand, Jeremiah would discover that when he had obeyed God by proclaiming His message, "they shall fight against thee;" (1:19a). His prophetic ministry would always hover between the two sharp horns of a dilemma. What was the significance of this fact in his own spiritual experience?

Jeremiah discovered that his mission required him to speak plainly and severely to his own people whom he dearly loved. They were guilty of rebellion against God and were in mortal danger of being blotted out because of their folly. Worst of all, the people seemed unaware that they were sinners or that they were in danger. Here may arise a conflict between one's sense of duty and one's affection for loved ones. Jeremiah knew that conflict within his own soul. The apathy of his people disturbed Jeremiah.

To whom shall I speak and testify, that they may hear?  
Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hear-  
ken; behold the word of Jehovah is become unto them a  
reproach; they have no delight in it. (6:10).

<sup>34</sup>*Loc. cit.* <sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 165.

Perhaps in that moment he felt a justification of his initial complaint, "... I cannot speak," (1:6). He could not speak because he could not be understood; and in this silence he suffered, for the wrath of God was flooding through him beyond restraint. Even the very judgment which he predicted aroused concern within his own soul (4:19-20). Note the colloquy on the stupidity of his people and the vision of all nature suffering from destruction and barrenness which follows this passage.

Gradually the opposition became more hostile and open. His own family rejected him (12:6), the people began to plot against him (18:18), and finally rioted in the temple court, demanding his death (26:8). At one time Pashhur beat Jeremiah and put him in stocks overnight (20:2); at another time he was arrested as a traitor and thrown into a miry pit (37:13; 38:6). During the later part of the siege of Jerusalem he was kept in prison (38:28) and finally was carried off to Egypt (43:5, 6).

Jeremiah was constantly trying to win his people to God but the more he preached the more they rebelled and turned from God. His messages were offensive to the people, but he could not escape from speaking God's word. In an agonizing prayer he cried to God;

For as often as I speak, I cry out; I cry, Violence and Destruction! because the word of Jehovah is made a reproach unto me, and a derision, all the day. And if I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in my heart as is were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary from forbearing, and I cannot contain. (20:8,9).

The ways in which God chose to work to accomplish His purposes were at times mysterious and distressing to Jeremiah. At times he seemed overwhelmed by the apparent disparity between God's promises and God's judgments upon the nation. He prayed once, "Ah, Lord Jehovah! surely thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reacheth unto the life." (4:10). At other times Jeremiah was distressed by the seeming injustice of life. Around him, Jeremiah noticed the wicked prospering in their sin and hypocritically worshiping God. Did not God see the sham of it all? And then, why was he, an earnest obedient servant, suffering so severely? It wasn't fair. His reasoning powers were stopped by this reversal of the old law of retribution which declared that the wicked will suffer and the innocent prosper. (12:1-3).

Even more difficult; God placed upon him prohibitions which more and more isolated him from society. Jeremiah was for-

bidden to speak to his family after they ejected him from Anathoth (12:6). He was commanded not to marry (16:2), nor to weep any more for his people (16:5). He was not to participate in their social times (16:8). This was too much for him; he poured out his soul to God in a heart rending prayer. It is recorded in Jeremiah 15:15-18. The climactic statement is in the last verse, "Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? wilt thou indeed be unto me as a deceitful brook, as waters that fail?" Jeremiah was dangerously close to the edge of the precipice beyond which is despair and utter dismay. Jeremiah could not see where he had been disobedient, or why in obedience he should suffer. Way God actually carrying out his threat to dismay him before people, and thus deliberately failing to fulfill His promise to be with him? Compare with his prayers recorded in 17:13-18 and in 18:19-23.

The barbs were digging deeply into Jeremiah's soul and he tried desperately to solve his problems. In one moment he sought to lose himself by self-identification with the people's punishment (9:1), but in another moment he longed to completely withdraw from them (9:2). At times hostility surged within his soul and he aggressively attacked his people by imprecation (11:20; 12:3; 17:18). His feelings toward God ranged from compliance, dependence, and desire for protection to resentment, offense, and hostility. But though Jeremiah accused God of unfaithfulness, he did not repudiate his own commission nor deny the reality of God Himself. Jeremiah also tried to repress the word of God within him (20:8-9) and went to the extreme, much like Job, of denouncing the fact of his own existence (20:14-18). There is a suggestion in these attempted solutions of a sense of being reduced to nothingness because of his suffering, and/or a flight from the realities of suffering by shifting responsibility for it from himself to other objects.

The struggles of Jeremiah indicate emotional instability. How did he attain the strength and courage portrayed in the incidents recorded in chapters twenty-six, thirty-six, thirty-seven, and thirty-eight, and forty-two? By what means did he solve his conflicts? This point is not as clearly described in the book of Jeremiah as we might like it to be. It is clear that God played an important role in the resolution of his conflicts. God gave him promises of help (1:8, 18-19; 15:20-21). He chided, urged, commanded, forbade, and explained (11:18, 22-23; 14:15). Jeremiah had a sense of clear conscience and of belonging to God which never fully left him; this gave him

courage to pour out his soul to God (12:1; 15:15,16).

But more important was the fact that God took pains to clarify the alternatives which faced Jeremiah in his hour of decision. An example is 12:5 in which passage God chides the prophet for wanting to give up so easily when the big battles were yet ahead. The strong implication is that God could not use such a man. The crucial moment is recorded in 15:19. God met the prophet in the vale of his despair and said, "If thou return, then will I bring thee again, that thou mayest stand before me; and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth; they shall return to thee but thou shalt not return unto them." Jeremiah must turn from confusion and despair to face God, and he must separate out from his life the feelings of resentment, self-pity, and bitterness which threatened to engulf him. If Jeremiah would do this much God would restore him and give him might and strength. It is strongly implied that if Jeremiah did not do this, the God-prophet relationship would be ended. The fact that Jeremiah became God's tower of strength in Jerusalem's dying hours is mute witness to what decision Jeremiah made in the face of God's alternatives. In accepting suffering as an integral part of his prophetic ministry, Jeremiah found peace and power in God.

The dualism expressed in Jeremiah's spiritual experiences is not two dissociated selves fighting a hopeless battle, but a relationship of two persons, God and Jeremiah, united in the mutual but difficult task of bringing a rebellious people back to the covenant relationship. Volz has made too sharp a distinction between prophet and man in Jeremiah. He suggests that they actually opposed each other.<sup>36</sup> That both the prophetic task and the prophet's own human emotions were a part of the matrix of the conflict within Jeremiah is true, but a sharp dissociation of two selves within the prophet is untenable. Was not Jeremiah's situation more like what Kierkegaard has described as the ever-present decision in which one must make a choice between the possibility of offense or of faith?<sup>37</sup>

In comparing the concept of the God-relation as set forth by Kierkegaard with the experience of Jeremiah, certain observations should be made. First, we have only the very brief narrative of Jeremiah's call which has any resemblance at all to the matter of becoming a believer. A more detailed study of his messages, however, would throw more light on the subject by showing what he expected of the people if they were to be delivered from destruction and be received back again into the good graces of God. Verbs like "turn", "return", "forsake"

<sup>36</sup>Paul Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia*, p. xxiv. <sup>37</sup>*Training in Christianity*, p. 80.

and many others would be a fruitful area of study. It is certain that a change in the life of the people was demanded.

Secondly, as to the continuation of the God-relation, we have noted such common traits as faith, offense, suffering, isolation, and the assertion of the importance of the Individual, in his absolute relation to the Absolute, as over against the claims of the crowd. In connection with this, one is impressed with the similarity between Kierkegaard's insistence that the relation should be no abstract thing but should be closely bound with the finite and all the relativities of time. It is this very thing which marked the difference between the writing prophet and the ecstatic. The writing prophet was very conscious of the relevance of his religious experience and his message to the crisis of the hour. It was steeped in the historical, the concrete. Can this be adequately explained by ascribing to Jeremiah, or any other of the writing prophets, the traits of the true ecstatic, or for that matter the traits of mental sickness? Too much of abnormal psychology has been applied to a study of these great men. They had their 'bad times' to be sure, but they possessed a mobility of spirit and a 'down-to-earthness' of perspective which stands in stark contrast to the rigidity of spirit and orientation in fantasy which marks the psychopathic. Kierkegaard at least recognized that fantasy was not the life-sphere of the man of true faith.

Thirdly, there is a sharp contrast between Kierkegaard and Jeremiah. Certainly, Jeremiah lacked the complicated and devious methods of presenting his messages which we find in most of Kierkegaard's philosophical works. Indirection, or striking from behind, was not one of Jeremiah's ways of working. Jeremiah was more artless, and straight-forward, with almost a total lack of concern for theoretical problems. As far as personalities are concerned, one cannot but feel that Jeremiah was far less morbid in spirit and more wholesome and open in his devotional life. If a choice must be made between the two, Jeremiah is to be preferred.

In conclusion, it may be observed that though there are features in Kierkegaard's personal life and in his writings which contrast quite sharply with Jeremiah, it must be admitted that some of Kierkegaard's insights provide a better means of understanding the great Hebrew prophets than either a study of ecstatic prophets or of abnormal psychology. An application of some of these insights to the other Hebrew prophets could be a fruitful line of study.



## Book Reviews

Books reviewed in THE ASBURY SEMINARIAN may be ordered from the Seminary Bookstore, Wilmore, Kentucky.

*Christianity and Communication*, by F. W. Dillistone, New York: Scribner's, 1956. 156 pages, \$3.00

When the distinguished Dean of Liverpool Cathedral writes a book, the religious world takes notice. Seldom has this reviewer felt more like saying, "He has done it again!" Christian communication has become a familiar theme for discussion and for written elaboration -- the more so as it is becoming a matter of frank recognition that the Christian Church has lost vocal touch with a large segment of the population of Christendom. It now helps little to say that the average hearer can make very little of the usual terminology of the Christian Church precisely because of the manner in which the liberal section of the Church sought so frantically to adapt herself to the secularism of the first half of the century. We are so confronted with a stubborn fact in our decade, that of general religious illiteracy.

It is to this problem that Dean Dillistone addresses himself. He approaches his subject historically, and shows the difficulties with which the Early Church was confronted, as it was faced with the task of making itself articulate in the thought-world of the Hellenistic period. The volume is masterly in its analysis of the thought-mold of this age, no less than in its understanding of the communication-problem in the Middle Ages.

The theme which underlies the entire work is, that all communication implies two elements, the pictorial or visible, and the audible word. He explores the manner in which in the Old Testament Revelation, both words and acts of God were media for the communication of the Message, moving from this to the manner in which the New Covenant was erected upon the same general framework of image and Word.

The latter part of the work is concerned with the manner in which the Christian kerygma served in its early form to challenge the hearer to a new and radically different formulation of his world-view, in terms of the centrality of the Incarnation. The same process is traced through the medieval period, and



into the period of the evangelization of the "frontier nations" of the North. One gets the impression that all of this is leading up to something of high significance.

Our author proceeds to consider the manner in which the modern period has been a period of the rise of new myths -- myths which seek status as foci for a world-view. He finds three competing myths: the myth of national independence, the myth of class-dominance, and the myth of economic self-sufficiency. These are, of course, the underlying motives for the activity, respectively, of the nations emerging from colonial status, the nations in the Marxist bloc, and the nations of the free world.

One by one, these myths are weighed against the central theme of the Biblical message, namely that the Son of God was incorporated, through the incarnation, "within the organism of the created order" (p. 100), and that it is through this act that the meaning of the universe is disclosed in its final and definitive form.

The last thirty-five pages are devoted to the application of this controlling concept to the task of the Christian ministry in our time. Dean Dilliston deals in succession with the themes, "The Effective Technique" and "The Task of Translation". His concern is, in large part, that the most effective understanding of the meaning of the Christian message's relevance to life in our time should be implemented by a daring employment of the newer techniques for communication. He does not offer final solutions or ultimate suggestions, but continues his emphasis upon the maximum effectiveness of such techniques as bring together into one operation the communication of both image and word.

The minister will find himself picking this volume up again and again, underlining many of its passages, and measuring his own effectiveness against its challenge. It is excellently written, so that even its use of the currently magical term 'myth' is intelligible. Christianity and Communication deserves a place upon the pastor's shelf of "highly active" books.

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H. B. Kuhn

*Everyday Life in Old Testament Times*, by E. W. Heaton. New York: Scribner's, 1956. 240 pages.

The difficulty of recapturing accurately the conditions of life in Bible times has long been recognized. We have known that many "Bible pictures" are more colorful than true to the times. The volume under review seeks to recover, with the especial aid of archaeological data, the panorama of life as it was lived during the period between the settlement of Israel in Palestine and the Exile in Babylon.

Such a work as this must of necessity involve some interpretation of Old Testament religious history, since our records of the period are author locates the Exodus at approximately 1300 B. C. and with this as a working date, divides the history, so that the Israelites are successively treated as liberated slaves, conquering heroes, amateur citizens, royal subjects, subjects of a divided monarchy, subservient tradesmen, and exiles.

The several chapters seek to trace the various elements in the panorama of human life as they related to these several levels of existence. Nomadic life, it appears, has tended to be over-glamorized; and the author seeks to show the difficult along with the attractive, with special reference to the nomadic ideal.

Successive chapters deal with Town Life, Home Life, Country Life, Industrial Life, Military Life, Civil Life, Professional Life, and (of course) Religious Life. The amount of research which has gone into this volume is immense. No less impressive is the series of 126 illustrations, by which nearly every phase of life which is dealt with in the narrative is indicated in pictorial fashion.

The author's tracing of governmental development takes for granted the centrifugal role of lingering tribal life; one wonders whether it is sufficiently sensitive to the factors which unified Israel. He has rather little appreciation for the period of the Judges, or for the significance of the work of the unusual figures who dominate this period. The establishment of the monarchy seems to him to have been inevitable: perhaps it was, human nature being what it was. In any case, he may make too little of the providential limitations set about the Hebrew monarchy. He might show more awareness of the manner in which both King and People were subject to Jehovah.

It is the final chapter, dealing with the Religious Life, which will interest the readers of this journal most. The author passes over with but brief mention the Tabernacle, with no

suggestion of the significance which the Old Testament assigns to it. Again, he may make too little of the manner in which "the pursuit of truth and goodness" was a real part of Old Testament religion. He seems to this reviewer rather too facile in his assumption that while Baalism was concerned with nature, that the worship of Jehovah had little or no relevance to the practicalities of settled life in Palestine.

With regard to the role of porphcey in the life of Israel's religion, Heaton seems to make too little of the work of Samuel and Elijah, in that he assumes that we see the major peaks of the prophetic range only from 750 B. C. onward. The Books of Samuel and Kings make it clear that the prophetic office was a vigorously creative one from the inauguration of the monarchy.

But bearing in mind some of these limitations, one must say that the volume is a highly worth-while one. Probably the author did not intend to give us a theology of the Old Testament, but to transmit to us something of the 'flavor' of life in Palestine in these centuries. In most respects, he has done this well. Certainly he has corrected many misapprehensions with respect to life in Bible times, and has done so with refreshing vigor and vividness. The book belongs in the pastor's library.

Harold B. Kuhn

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*Man of Sorrows.* Herman Hoeksema, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956. 129 pages. \$2.00.

This is one of five books written by this author on the passion and death of our Lord. In these and a dozen or more other volumes, Mr. Hoeksema has distinguished himself as one of America's contemporary Reformed theologians and devotional writers. He is currently serving as Professor of Dogmatics and New-Testament Exegesis in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In this volume Mr. Hoeksema explains and applies some of "those beautiful and marvelous passages of the prophecy of Isaiah that speak of the Suffering Servant... the Man of Sorrows" (p. 7). Designed as devotional reading for the "lenten season," the book's ten chapters set forth the Saviour's sufferings and resurrection as the very heart of the gospel message of salvation. For the reviewer, few books have more movingly presented "the Man of Sorrows" in His earthly life as He faced

His sacrificial death and glorious bodily resurrection. Nor can one escape the evidential force of predictive prophecy in Isaiah 50 through 53 concerning Christ and its literal fulfillment in the Gospels on Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

While the center of the Christian faith is presented in these telling chapters, it is also integrally related to the whole scheme of theology, Calvinistically-viewed, from the person of God in eternity past to the "last things" in eternity ahead. To be sure many readers of this volume, along with the reviewer, will object to the implicit as well as the explicit references to such emphases as unconditional election, limited atonement (efficacious for the elect), the total inability of man, irresistible grace, and the final perseverance of the saints; however, all Bible-believing readers will acknowledge that the author has led them to the very fountain-head of our holy Christianity.

Even though Mr. Hoeksema has presented here a strong case for the "satisfactionist theory" of the atonement, which will seem inadequate to many as the fullest and richest scriptural view of Christ's death, yet he has so deeply embedded his system in Scripture quotations, accompanied by fresh and penetrating insights, that the honest reader is overwhelmed with the evidence that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the suffering, atoning Saviour of the world.

No minister of Christ ought to approach his "lenten-season preaching" with any less vision of Christ as the "Man of Sorrows" than is presented in this volume. Few authors approximate Mr. Hoeksema's logic and Christian devotion in their presentation of the Saviour's supreme work in redemption as it centers in the cross. Evangelically-minded ministers will be greatly profited by meditating over the scriptural content of these effectively-written pages.

Delbert R. Rose

*The Dynamics of Faith*, by Paul Tillich. New York: Harper & Bros., 1957. 127 pages. \$2.75.

Prof. Tillich has set forth a somewhat popularized version of a central aspect of his theology in this volume, which is the twelfth in a series entitled "World Perspectives." Edited by Ruth Nanda Anshen, the series seeks to set forth "the interrelation of the changing religious, scientific, artistic, political, economic and social influences upon man's total experience." More specifically, it proposes to examine the less tangible

features of modern civilization, features which the scientific world has tended to overlook in its study of the questions of matter and energy.

The Dynamics of Faith, like the other volumes in the series, proposes to examine its subject "from a broad perspective of the world community, not from the Judeo-Christian, Western or Eastern viewpoint alone." (p. ix). In his definition of faith, he develops the theme that "Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned." (p. 1). It is unconditional response to an unconditional demand. As ultimate concern, it is an act of the whole personality (p. 4), and as such it reflects the dynamics of personal life. Tillich emphasizes that faith is "ecstatic," in that it includes both the rational and non-rational drives, while at the same time transcending them.

The volume treats briefly the relation of this definition of faith to the basic concepts of the thought of Rudolf Otto (pp. 12f); Tillich suggests the category of 'divine-demonic' as a characterization of the polarity with which the 'ultimate' confronts man. The question of the transcendence of the 'ultimate' raises the perennial question, What is the relation of 'faith' to the creedal statements of Christendom? In Chapter II, "What Faith is Not," our author makes it clear that he considers that a faith which centers in the acceptance of the propositional accuracy of a theological system to be idolatry. At best, thinks Prof. Tillich, doctrine can be nothing more than a symbolic presentation of the ultimate.

This raises in turn the question of the truth of faith. Having rejected with a sweep the historicity of the Biblical record, and having relegated such doctrines as the Fall and the Virgin Birth to the realm of mythology, he points out that "faith is true if it adequately expresses an ultimate concern." (p. 96). In speaking of Jesus Christ, he suggests, with Bultmann, that it is impossible to secure from the Gospels an accurate picture of the historic life of our Lord, but assures us that "Any acceptance of Jesus as the Christ which is not the acceptance of Jesus the crucified is a form of idolatry." (p. 98). Thus the symbol of the Cross is most adequate because it is a non-ultimate symbol of the ultimate. In other words, the superiority of Christianity lies in its possession of a symbol which is the embodiment of the principle of symbolism.

From the foregoing, it is clear that what Prof. Tillich is saying is something radically other than that which Christianity has been proclaiming. His work embodies, it seems to this reviewer, two fundamental misconceptions: first, the definition of faith in terms of 'ultimate concern.' Practically speaking,



this definition would allow of no atheism: the marxist in his pursuit of class dominance as an ultimate is a 'man of faith' no less than the secularist in his frenzied pursuit of temporal objectives. The second misconception is, that the content of faith is symbol rather than propositional truth. Tillich's 'faith' has little or no relation to historic fact, and make no place for the uniqueness of Jesus Christ or for His redemptive mission.

The author is challenging in his analysis of idolatries, and in his critique of secularism. He may have something to say to Modern Man at the point of his failure of nerve and his despair. But to say that Tillich's 'theology' is in any sense reflective of the genius of historic Christianity is to overlook his major theses. A definition of 'religion' it may be; a Christian theology it is not.

Harold B. Kuhn

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*Israel and the Aramaeans of Damascus*, Merrill F. Unger, London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd. pp. 180.

One of the important projects of the Evangelical Theological Society has been the publication of outstanding manuscripts on biblical and theological themes written by evangelical scholars. This book was chosen as the second in a series of volumes. It is the essence of a doctoral dissertation presented to John Hopkins University, revised for popular reading.

Dr. Unger has gathered the pertinent data, made available by biblical statements and archaeological research, on the rise and fall of the Syrian nation which had its center in Damascus. The book is an example of thorough and scholarly research pursued in the spirit of evangelicalism. There have been too few evangelical students of Old Testament history who have been well trained in the sciences of philology and archaeology. By his several publications, which includes this one, Unger has improved himself to be among the best of the present generation. Serious students who desire real light upon a hitherto dark spot in Old Testament history will find this volume invaluable.

The actual discussion of Syria's role in history covers only 109 pages. The remainder of the book is composed of a very valuable series of footnotes to each of the chapters. These are full of technical material which advanced students of the Old Testament will appreciate. One defect in the copy before the reviewer is that pages 121 through 136 have been displaced



by a section from another book which has been accidentally inserted. Aside from this error, the book has good format and a readable type.

G. Herbert Livingston

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